

CHARTISM AND THE CHURCHES

With special reference to Lancashire

An account of

The Churches and Social Reform in the Chartist Period

by

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PREFACE

In the early months of 1944 I began a correspondence with Principal Hugh Watt, Dean of the Faculty of Divinity of Edinburgh University, which lasted until this thesis was completed. It is largely as a result of his patience and of his direction that the work has achieved its present form. A sociological treatise of this type is difficult to maintain within set limits and the writer has been indebted to Principal Watt for the frankness of his criticisms and for his perseverance in keeping the actual subject to the forefront.

The tutorial guidance has been undertaken by Mr. Arthur Birnie M.A., Reader in Economic History at Edinburgh University. His exact historical knowledge and painstaking insisting on detail have given the work an accuracy it would not otherwise possess. His kindness has extended beyond the bounds of duty and again and again his encouragement has been an invaluable incentive in pursuing the study of particular problems.

Finally, I have to thank my friend, Mr. G.S. Clements, for his vigilance in reading the work in all its stages, and the director of the Dr. Williams' Library for making

available to me the records of the Lancashire Baptist Churches and the Swarthmore Lectures dealing with the social contribution of the Society of Friends.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N.

This account of the Churches and Social Reform in the Chartist period had its inception in war-time London. The spirit of reform was in the air. The Beveridge Report had caught the imagination of the public and, by reading either the official publication, or the very full summaries which appeared in the Press, thousands of people had become familiar with its declared intention of eliminating poverty, disease and ignorance from the life of the community. Inevitably, in countless discussion groups the question was put: "What part are the Churches destined to play in movements seeking to implement these proposals?" There was much in the situation to remind the careful observer of the period of the Chartist agitation. The greatest similarity in the two periods is that they were bridging periods between two different orders. The Chartist period was a period of social awakening between the heartless economics first developed in the eighteenth century and the inevitable measures of reform in the middle of last century. The period of the Beveridge Report was one in which it was evident that the dissemination of knowledge, the increased control over the powers of nature, and a widespread realisation that no civilised nation could afford to have

any of its citizens living brutishly or unhealthily, had outmoded the pre-war economic theories.

In such a situation it seemed worthwhile to begin a study of the attitude of the Churches to Chartism, an aspect of the movement which, with one notable exception, has been almost completely ignored by historians. The exception is the account of "Chartism and the Churches", produced for the Columbia University Series in History, Law, and Economics in 1916, by Harold U. Faulkner. Excellent as this account is, one essay could not be expected to do more than map out the field and indicate the main lines which could be followed most profitably by later research students.

The present writer's original intention was to give an account of Chartism and the Churches within the County of Lancashire. Almost immediately, however, it became apparent that the geographical distribution of Chartism tells us very little; the movement can only be understood in its moral, social, and spiritual significance if it is seen against the background of life in the whole country during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Chartist period was one of expansion; communications were rapidly improving, and the scope of the spoken and written word was being widened. Ideas, then, would be disseminated much more readily than

would have been the case, say, in 1800; this would almost certainly militate against the localisation of particular modes of thought or action within any particular geographical area. Yet equally important is the fact that it is quite impossible to write a satisfactory account of any aspect of Chartism without giving great weight to the activities of the Chartists in Lancashire; for although the movement was actually inaugurated at a meeting of the London Working Men's Association, it received its strongest support from, and achieved its greatest success among, the toiling masses of the industrial towns of Lancashire.

Chartism existed as an organised expression of working-class discontent from 1837 to 1852, but no indication of its origin, purpose, and achievements could be given if that period were studied in isolation. It arose out of the events which marked the development of an industrial community during, and in the years immediately succeeding, the Napoleonic Wars. The economic dislocation which produced such a degree of poverty and hunger as to predispose the workers to revolutionary ideas, was in a very real sense an outcome of the great Continental Wars. The Working Classes had placed great hopes in the Reform Act of 1832 and these had not been realised; they had fought for

Sadler's Bill - the Ten Hours Bill - and they had lost the campaign, for the limitation of hours was not in fact achieved until 1847. The New Parliament of which they had expected such great things, had, in passing the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, raised over their old age and their periods of unemployment the grim spectre of the workhouse. These events contained the seeds of Chartism, and something must be said of the agitation for Factory Reform, and Education, and the revolt against the ⁷¹New Poor Law, if its character as a mass agitation is to be understood and the reasons for its apparent failure to be appreciated. These parallel movements also won the greatest support from the Lancashire workers, but they cannot be studied unless Lancashire is seen in the setting ^{1.} of the whole country.

Similar difficulties at once became evident when the attitude of religious bodies to social questions came under review. In the case of the Anglican and Wesleyan Churches with their highly centralised organisations, the policies of the Lancashire Churches were in a large measure determined by the decisions of leaders and conferences meeting in many parts of the country, and legislating for all the Churches of their communion. In the case of the Wesleyan Church, it seemed

1. See G. D. H. Cole - Chartist Portraits pp 9 - 10

essential to make clear how the reactionary character of Conference decisions led to schisms, and how Methodism expressed its message through the medium of groups and denominations which had seceded from the parent body. The Baptist and Congregational theories of church government were more elastic and a larger measure of local autonomy in their Churches was allowed; it was therefore possible for these organisations to adapt themselves to purely local conditions, and, in their case, the impact of social reform on religion can be estimated within their own areas. The Roman Catholic Church in Lancashire, with its large influx of Irish immigrants during the Chartist era, presents highly intricate social and economic problems which call for a separate and exhaustive study. In this work only the main outlines of such problems have been indicated.

If the treatment of the subject had been confined to its narrowest limitations, it would have been possible to state in two or three paragraphs that the Churches as organisations, and the vast majority of their members, ignored the Chartist aspirations for reform and condemned the tactics adopted by the Chartists. Such a picture would be false and misleading. Many people in the Churches sympathised with the aims of the Chartists, felt a sense of concern and responsibility for the hunger and discontent of which Chartism

was the outcome, but were repelled by the element of violence in the campaign and by the revolutionary nature of the points in the Charter. Such people gave their support to other contemporary social reform movements and occasionally found themselves swept into Chartist activity. The classic case, of this kind, in Lancashire, was Joseph Rayner Stephens, to whom a separate chapter has been devoted, and whose life-story has still to be written with any degree of accuracy. In this way even the Wesleyan Church -- fiercest of all denominations in its opposition to Chartism -- produced some notable Chartist leaders.

At first sight, the story of Chartism and its social gospel may not appear to be complex, but when we have set the movement and the ideals of the Christians within it against the background of the ecclesiastical, social and economic environment characteristic of industrial England during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, we find we have wandered into a labyrinth from which it is difficult to emerge with any clear-cut theories. Much work remains to be done in what is practically a virgin field of research.

The periodicals and magazines of the period, educational, religious, general, and political, have provided the most adequate supply of source material. Of the religious papers the "Nonconformist", the "Guardian", the "Baptist Magazine",

the "Congregational Magazine" and the "Church of England Magazine" have proved themselves mines of information. On the wider questions reference has been made to such national organs of opinion as "The Edinburgh Review", the "Eclectic Review", the "Quarterly Review", "Blackwood's Magazine," "Fraser's Magazine," and the "Journal of the Royal Statistical Society". Of the political and Chartist papers - the "Northern Star", "McDouall's Chartist Circular", the "English Chartist Circular," the "People's Magazine," the "Northern Tribune", the "Reformer's Almanac", and the "Political Register" have been freely drawn upon. After 1848 the most notable response of the Churches to the challenge in Chartism was provided by the Christian Socialist Movement. Apart from references in various chapters, Christian Socialism has been treated in Chapter XVII and its contribution has been assessed in the light of the information provided by the papers produced by the Movement - the "Christian Socialist", "Politics for the People" and the "Journal of Association." Other magazines and newspapers have been quoted and are listed in the Bibliography.

The Baptist Historical Association papers proved to contain complete records of the Baptists in Lancashire, and the little known works of Benjamin Nightingale gave a very comprehensive treatment of Congregationalism in the county. Extensive use has been made of the Minutes of

Conferences and Annual Circulars, and, in the case of Methodism, of the Journal and collected works of Wesley.

On the social historical side the writer records his great indebtedness to such standard authorities as Clapham, Halévy, Hammond, Howell, Trevelyan, Cole, Dolléans and Dierlamm, and on the Church side to Bready, Patterson (M.U.) Wakeman, Horne, Townend, Peel, Selbie, Carlile and Holt, to mention only a few. The only full contemporary study of Chartism, that by R. G. Gammage, has naturally been referred to repeatedly, and the badly written but valuable study of J. R. Stephens by Holyoake has provided material available nowhere else.

Every effort has been made to avoid the error of judging the behaviour of the Churches in the early Victorian age by the standards of social sympathy we expect from organised religious communities in modern times. Equally invidious, however, has been the danger of exaggerating the influence of the Christian ethic on the crusade itself. The thesis has not been written to substantiate any denominational or political prejudice, but aims at presenting a clear picture of the interrelation of the Churches and the reform movements in the age of the Chartists. In a religious and sociological study it is seldom easy to avoid the bias due to personal convictions and where this has not been successfully achieved the writer asks the indulgence of the reader.

h/ Mc Lellan
Barry

CHAPTER I

CHARTISM AND CONTEMPORARY MOVEMENTS.

There is no complete isolation in social life; and no historical phenomenon can be understood unless it be related to the whole background of life and thought of which it formed a part. Chartism was a product of those stirring events which, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, heralded the founding of a new order in social life. This decisive generation witnessed the beginning of a "revolution in industry", which opened up vast possibilities of expansion to the recently-established rule of industrial capitalism.

(a) It was in 1775 that James Watt concluded a partnership with Matthew Boulton which symbolised the alliance between science and industry which characterised the following century.

(b) With the American Declaration of Independence a year later, the old colonial system on which so much of the "Mercantilist Theory" was based, lost one of its most powerful props.

(c) Before the end of the Century the French revolution sealed the fate of what remained of medieval society.¹

1 Erich Roll - A History of Economic Thought p.140 et seq.

(a) There was, however, one other event of supreme importance. In 1776 Adam Smith (1723-1790) published his epoch-making work "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations," outlining an economic theory which was destined to be hailed as a moral and naturalistic defence of the new order of society. It is well to remember that this Scottish philosopher was also the author of a great work in moral philosophy - "The Theory of Moral Sentiments" -- and the economic theories of one book are clearly related to the moral concepts of the other. According to Adam Smith human conduct was naturally directed by six motives; self-love, sympathy, the desire to be free, a sense of propriety, a habit of labour, and the propensity to barter. Given these springs of conduct each man was naturally the best judge of his own interest and should therefore be left free to pursue it in his own way. If left to himself he would not only attain his own best advantage, but he would also further the common good. This result was achieved because Providence had made society into a system in which a natural order prevailed. The impact of this theory upon business men and politicians alike was very great, for although this pioneer of economic liberalism spoke in lucid and persuasive terms, his success would have been much less marked had he spoken to an audience not quite so ready to receive his

message. He spoke with the voice of the time, the voice of the industrialists who were anxious to sweep away all restrictions on the market and on the supply of labour - surviving from the now obsolescent economic system which had hinged on merchant capital and the landed interest. Adam Smith had designated self-interest as the prime motive in human conduct; the new industrialists - many of them genuinely humane and pious men - were gratified to be told that the pursuit of profit which was a corollary of this assumption, was not only morally defensible, but even praiseworthy.

Adam Smith's teachings, reinforced by Malthus' Essay on Population,¹ and by the writings of David Ricardo embodying his theories of value and distribution,² led to the emergence in the social and economic order of the nation of a new principle of the "survival of the fittest". The assumption, implicit in such a laissez-faire concept of society, that there must inevitably be in the social system a hard core of almost irremediable misery, came to be regarded as having almost the force of a divine law. Chartism was born as a protest against and a denial of these implications. The word itself was coined in 1837 to designate a set of principles which were later embodied

1 T. R. Malthus. "Essay on the Principle of Population as it affects the future improvement of Society". 1798.

2 David Ricardo. "The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation," 1817.
1817.

in the famous "Peoples' Charter" and the rise and decline of Chartism and, its rebellion against the "Classical" Economy had a vigorous impact on social, political and religious life during the succeeding twenty years. Its progenitors were "hunger and hatred", and its essential characteristics were well summarised by Carlyle when he declared "Chartism means the bitter discontent grown fierce and mad It is a new name for a thing which has many names, which will yet have many."¹ Such a definition reveals its integral connection with a whole host of popular movements both before and after its inception.

Although at its inauguration the movement attracted a number of recruits from the middle class, in a few years Engels was able to write of it as the first distinctive workmen's movement of modern times.² Gammage, the only significant narrator who wrote from inside the movement, set its whole class-structure in clear perspective when he wrote, "Political reforms were certainly valued because of their abstract justice, but they were also looked upon as a means of securing a better social position for the humbler classes..... It may be doubted whether there ever was a great political Movement of the people without a social origin."³ From this and his subsequent account it is

1 Carlyle - Essay (In "Historical & Political Essays") on Chartism. Chap. I. p. 116.

2 Engels "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific" - p.xxx

3 R.G.Gammage - History of the Chartist Movement p.9.

obvious that Chartism quickly resolved itself into an instrument in the struggle by the working man for the reconstruction of the basis of his social life. This was especially true of the Chartists in the North of England, where there was a rugged determination to keep out of positions of leadership men of wealth or education whose motives were at all obscure. And in Lancashire, Chartism remained almost exclusively a proletarian movement.¹ Though Gannage recognises this as a negation of wisdom, and holds that the movement was wrecked on this rock, Dibelius, the German historian of our own century, assesses its cause more accurately. In his famous account of England, delivered as lectures shortly after the first world-war, he declares, "Once in 1832, he (the worker) had fought in alliance with the Liberals for an extension of the franchise. When, the battle won, the spoils all went to the middle-classes, the workers plunged into the turgid sea of the Chartist Movement."²

This succinct declaration lights up one important point, namely that the famous six points of the People's Charter, though political in expression, were social and economic in purpose. The cardinal principle, "political equality" was selected as a weapon most likely to secure

¹ R. G. Gannage - History of the Chartist Movement, p.119.
² Wilhelm Dibelius - England (translated by Mary A. Hamilton, M.P.) p.199.

equality of condition and the abolition of class privilege. It was felt that social equality would of itself fill in the wide gulf which separated the wealthy from the miserable working-class, and the conviction grew that this equality could be accomplished only by the united efforts of the workers. It is this deliberate recognition of class-consciousness which distinguishes Chartism from Utopian Socialism and from the earlier democratic movements. Since it was the first modern movement dominated by such a proletarian consciousness, it is not surprising to discover that, throughout the whole of its course, it was weakened by conflicting purposes and by lack of effective central direction. Even in its class purpose its success was incomplete, for in its plans, it constantly found itself linking up with revolutionary activity originating in the "petit bourgeois."

a. The Soil of Chartism

Chartism, then was essentially an urban movement drawing its strength in overwhelming preponderance from the industrial towns of Lancashire and the other northern counties. Like Trade Unionism, Chartism had its birth among the more highly-paid and intelligent artisans of London, and resembled the former also in that it gained its firmest foothold and the most loyal adherents among the factory workers of the North.

It is important to remember that Chartism was born in the aftermath of a long and costly war, with all the attendant circumstances of misery and uncertainty: Britain at the end of the Napoleonic wars was very different from the country which had taken up the struggle against France. In the England before 1790 the ruling class came in the main from the great landowners, while in the post-Napoleonic era the governing body was drawn in large measure from the new industrialists. This age found the factory-workers of the North with no established defences; their recruitment had been much too casual to give them any other bond of unity than that of their common poverty. They were drawn from the ranks of countless occupations and from almost every part of the British Isles. They included craftsmen whose crafts had been superseded, returning servicemen unable to find any other job, agricultural labourers driven from the

land, parents driven to find an occupation where even young children could help in augmenting the family budget, Irish immigrants and even children from the workhouses of the south. Harassed by hunger and tormented by fear, they faced the grim alternative of fourteen to sixteen hours a day in the factory, or the even greater horror and humiliation of the workhouse.

Economic reasons beyond their comprehension played a real part in creating this misery. The ending of the war, by making practically all workers available for peacetime products, flooded the labour-market and wages shot down. The Government was compelled to make some arrangements for meeting the enormous debt which had accumulated during the war, and agricultural prices fell disastrously, upsetting the whole economy of life. At this moment the opportunity of developing their own industries was eagerly seized by some of Britain's best customers and new and formidable rivals began to appear on the scene, aggravating an already difficult situation. Too little was known of cause and effect in economic life for the leaders to realise the temporary nature of such industrial problems.

The government was suddenly faced with intricate human and social problems for which there were few, if any, precedents, and for the solution of which they could provide

no expert guidance. It is possible to go even further, and to say that many of the country's rulers were unaware that they were called upon to do anything other than maintain order. Transition from war to peace is never an easy task, and it becomes doubly difficult when it is accompanied by thoughtless exploitation of the masses in pursuance of an iron-law of social order.

¹
Engels has given a picture of the state of industrial Lancashire during the Chartist era; and Mrs. Gaskell, and a number of other novelists, have presented, in the form of fiction, a realistic account of the living conditions of the factory workers. Engels may be dismissed as a Socialist agitator looking for the black spots, and Mrs. Gaskell as a novelist merely wishing to appeal to the emotions of her readers, but unfortunately for such an interpretation, the accuracy of the picture they present is attested in the sober reports of the Royal Commission on the Health of Towns. ³ All these reports belong to the forties, and all tell a tale

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1. Friedrich Engels. "Die Lage der arbeitenden Klassen in England". 1845. Translated by F. K. Wischnewetzky as "The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844".
 2. Mrs. Gaskell. "Mary Barton". (1848) (1892)
 3. (a) "The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population". 1842
(b) "The State of Large Towns and Populous Districts".
These Reports were submitted by Edward Chadwick and his collaborators.

substantiating the picture drawn by Engels. Indeed he drew largely on Chadwick's reports to reinforce the impression he had received by personal observation. Living in Manchester, and personally engaged in the cotton trade as the representative of a German firm, he had ample opportunities for accurate observation.

In his impression Engels describes how the great majority of the people of "Greater Manchester" (pop. 350,000) live in wretched damp, filthy cottages....." the streets which surround them are usually in the most miserable and filthy condition, laid out without the slightest reference to ventilation, with reference solely to the profit secured by the contractor..... No cleanliness, no convenience, and consequently no comfortable family life is possible in the workingmen's dwellings of Manchester; in such dwellings only a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and physically to bestiality, could feel comfortable and at home." Such were the living conditions of the great masses of the people. Engels, after describing the wretched clothing, unfit to keep out the cold or rain, goes on to speak of the food. He cites the continual prosecutions of traders and hucksters for selling adulterated or tainted and poisonous goods and declares that the type of food varied with wages. The best-paid workers, in families where all members were in employment, would have regular supplies of meat and

bacon and cheese, but such families were few and far between. At the other end of the scale were the Irish immigrants, whose scanty wages provided them with a diet of potatoes and weak tea. "The average" wrote Engels "is much nearer the worst case than the best." What was worse was that trade was subject to so many violent fluctuations that even the lowest wage could not be relied upon.^{1.}

Not only was the absolute degree of poverty great, but the sharp contrast existing between the misery and dependence of the many and the opulence of the few, provided just the right setting for those who would preach the gospel of revolution. By the year 1836 the situation was truly desperate, for it was then abundantly clear that the Reform Act of 1832 "so eagerly acclaimed by the people, had merely substituted a 'manufacturing autocracy' for the 'traditional landed aristocracy' at Westminster."

The obvious failure of the Reform Act allied to the debacle of Robert Owen's "Grand Consolidated Trade Union" scheme, led to the formation of the London Working Men's Association on June 16th 1836, under the leadership of men

1. G. D. H. Cole - "A Century of Co-operation" p. 4 - 6.

who for a number of years had been associated with various phases of the working-class movement. Immediately upon its formation Henry Hetherington and John Cleave, the champions of a free unstamped press, and Henry Vincent, a prominent trade union leader, were engaged to tour the country stirring up the interest of the masses. The objects of the Association were: "To draw into one bond of unity the intelligent and influential portion of the working classes in town and country. To seek by every legal means to place all classes of society in possession of equal political and social rights".¹ Within a very short time they were successful in organising a great number of working men's associations, and, encouraged by this response, the leaders published a petition for a new Parliamentary Constitution. The petition contained the substance of the pamphlet - "The Rotten House of Commons",² and was commented upon by many Radical writers as a document of startling importance.

This petition was drawn up by William Lovett and contained the nucleus of the historic "Peoples' Charter". The House of Commons was requested to enact a law withiththe

1. M. Hovell - The Chartist Movement p. 60.

2. "An exposition of the present state of the Franchise, and an appeal to the Nation of the course to be pursued in the approaching crisis" - Hetherington, Strand.

following Six Points:-

- (1) Equal Representation.
- (2) Universal Suffrage.
- (3) Annual Parliaments.
- (4) Abolition of Property Qualification for Members of Parliament.
- (5) Vote by Ballot.
- (6) Payment of Members.

In a sense, these "Six Points" reveal the essential optimism, which characterised the Movement; for they were based upon the expectation of producing a new society by means of a political programme and through the influence of comparatively mild constitutional changes. The events of the century revealed the hollowness of this optimism. With the exception of "Annual Parliaments", all these have now been embodied in the Constitution, but the social and economic changes which they have produced have been spread over so long a period, and have been in such modest increments, that no sense of revolutionary disturbance has been produced. It seems incredible that the Chartist generation of workers could have regarded their implementation as the immediate panacea for all social evils. Stranger still, none of these demands was, in fact, new, for the manifesto was largely based on the political programme preached by the Duke of Rutland and Charles James Fox in the 1780's, and all six points had been incorporated in one reform movement or another for decades. Long before Chartism was organised, all the economic, social and political changes it advocated had found champions.

The key to the mystery of the enthusiasm which now greeted them is provided by Foakes-Jackson when he points out that^{1.} "Modern England is not an old country but a new one." That movement of scientific and technological advance styled "the Industrial Revolution" inaugurated a new age, one which still continues, for our life tends to be based more upon experiment than upon tradition. The England of the 1830's however, was an old country, and had far more kinship with the age of the Tudors than with modern times. There was one important distinction nevertheless, between England in the early nineteenth century and Tudor England, - the machinery of government no longer bore any relationship to the needs of the people. The central control of Local Government and economic life inherent in the Tudor scheme had long since broken down. Under this unprecedented strain it lost all semblance of effective functioning; hence the campaign by the chief sufferers to apply at once, all the remedies the reformers could bring to their notice. It is significant that E. L. Woodward should refer to the England of 1815-70 as "The Age of Reform."

In Lancashire itself the early nineteenth century was characterised by a great boom in cotton, bringing into the country hordes of new workers, for whom no adequate housing facilities existed and whose common bitterness provided just the kind of soil in which the plant of Chartistism could most

1. F. J. Foakes-Jackson - Social life in England
1750 - 1850. p.214 ff.

easily grow. Of all the avenues to individual wealth, as well as to pauperism and degradation and misery which the Industrial Revolution opened up, none was so certain as cotton. Factories sprang up everywhere, cheap labour was to be had in abundance, and Lancashire rapidly became the key area of the new Industrial life of the nation. It was inevitable that the centre of political interest should tend to shift from London to Manchester. As it had been the testing ground of Trade-Unionism, so Lancashire became the great field of the Chartist missionaries. Success in the County was regarded as assuring success throughout the Country.

The increased importance of the county can be measured in purely statistical terms. In the 1820's Lancashire imported something like 100,000 tons of cotton, while in 1848 the figure had reached nearly 350,000 tons. During the same period the population of the industrial towns was growing at a great pace. We can get an idea of the pace if we take the census figures for three years, for some of the chief towns in the county.

	<u>1801</u>	<u>1831</u>	<u>1851</u>
1. Manchester } and Salford. }	90,000	237,000	400,000
2. Oldham	22,000	51,000	72,000
3. Bolton	18,000	42,000	61,000
4. Blackburn	12,000	27,000	65,000

Where did these immigrants come from? In the case of Lancashire many of them came from Ireland, for that unhappy country was a close neighbour. The Irish peasant who arrived in the county was a victim of unexampled misgovernment and neglect, and in the words of a great authority, Sir G.C. Cornwall, his immigration into the country was "an example of a less civilised population spreading themselves as a kind of substratum beneath a more civilised community."^{2.} In 1841 the Irish made up one-tenth of the population of Manchester, and a seventh of the population of Liverpool. At this time in the whole County there were 133,000 Irish people but by 1851 this had risen to nearly 200,000.^{3.}

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1. Compiled from Labour Migration in England 1800-50 by Arthur Redford (1926)
 2. Report to the Poor Law Commissioners on the Irish Poor. Appendix G.1836.
 3. J. L. & B. Hammond - The Age of the Chartists. p. 23-4.

Here in Lancashire were all the elements of a desperate social problem. Into the towns came the old Hand-loom weavers and craftsmen, losing their sense of pride in the impersonal routine of the factory. Into the same towns, also, came men and women with peasant outlook and tradition, accustomed to the peace and beauty of nature, to be shut up in slum and alley; into them at the same time came immigrants from an Ireland of deadly poverty, bringing their own customs and religion into a society struggling with misery and poverty and torn by sectarian strife. In these towns the Churches were called upon to satisfy the spiritual needs of a strangely mixed population, just beginning to adjust itself to the great industrial society of which they had become a part. The evidence of men's power over the forces of the universe was everywhere clear and impressive, and religion was called upon to fit the "faith once delivered" into a new context, and justify the glaring inequalities of life which the revolution in industrial power had created or emphasised.¹

b. Contemporary Movements.

1. Poor Law Reform. In any attempt to determine the relative importance of the causes which led to the Chartist revolt pride of place must be given to the "New Poor Law". The

1. J. L. and B. Hammond. "The Age of the Chartists". p.28-29.

Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 (4 & 5 William IV.c.76) suspended the Elizabethan enactment of 1601 and temporarily disrupted the whole social life of the Country. In his essay on Chartism (1839) Carlyle makes scathing references to this Act "That the Poor Law Amendment should be, as we sometimes hear it named, the 'Chief glory' of a Reform Cabinet, betokens, one would imagine, rather a scarcity of glory there If paupers are made miserable, paupers will needs decline in multitude. It is a secret known to all rat-catchers: stop up the granary crevices, afflict with continual mewing, alarm and going-off of traps, your 'chargeable labourers' disappear and cease from the establishment. A still briefer method is that of arsenic..."¹

A much more recent writer, J.H.Rose, declares that the Peoples' Charter would never have been drawn up but for the blaze of discontent caused by the exorbitant stamp duty on newspapers and by the severity of the new Poor Law.² The attitude of the ordinary operative of a Lancashire mill was well summed up by Cobbett when he declared in the House of Commons "that the right of the English poor to relief in cases of indigence was as sound and good a right as that of any gentleman or nobleman to the possession of his lands."³

Almost to the end of the "thirties" the old Poor Law had remained in force in most of the manufacturing areas, and

1 Carlyle - Historical and Political Essays. Chartism ch.III. p.28-29.

2 J.H.Rose. Rise of Democracy. p. 54.

3 Hansard 3rd. series. Vol. XXIII P.1336.

and it had been impossible for the Poor Law Commissioners to enforce their policy of a ban on outdoor relief to the able-bodied. The Poor Law had served as a form of unemployment relief in times of serious distress, though it had not, in the North of England, been used to subsidise the wages of persons in regular work, for these were, generally speaking, in Lancashire no "Speenhamland" scales of outdoor relief providing a bare subsistence living out of the rates. But there was, for the destitute who could not find work, a recourse to the parish authorities; and large sums had been paid out in this way, in many areas when trade was bad. By the "forties", except in a few places where the New Poor Law with its Boards of Guardians was still being successfully defied, (e.g. Toomorden inspired by John Fielden) the Commissioners had installed the new system, and outdoor relief, at any rate for the able-bodied, was no longer to be had. If they were destitute they could go to the workhouse, to be separated from their wives and children and to have such self-respect as they still retained knocked out of them by measures designed to deter them from a poverty which they had no means of escaping. In his novel "Clayhanger" - Arnold Bennett has an unforgettable description of one of these Bastilles - "The flogging had not nauseated him, but the bread and skilly revolted his pampered tastes. Never had he, with all his experience, seen nor smelt anything so foully disgusting. When supper was completed, a minor

official interceded with the Almighty in various ways for ten minutes."¹ If they rejected the workhouse they could starve, unless they had friends or relatives who could see them through. Society, having made its offer of the workhouse, repudiated all further responsibility. If they chose to starve, it was their own doing, and some of them actually did starve, while many more borrowed and waited wretchedly in destitution for the return of better times.

Is it any wonder that the workers regarded this policy as a plot of the ruling classes to get them to accept cheap labour by cutting off their old alternative of Parish Relief? Their bitter reaction to this policy is well illustrated by the Chartist petition of 1842, in which they take occasion to denounce the "Poor Law Amendment Act" as "contrary to all previous statutes, opposed to the spirit of the constitution and an actual violation of the Christian religion."² Chartism becomes easier to understand when we realise that thousands upon thousands saw no other prospect in front of them when unemployment and old age came, than that of spending years in the grim new bastilles arising everywhere.

It is of particular interest to notice that the popular leaders oftentimes based their objection to the Act on the fact that it was a violation of Christian principles, and they defended this position with numerous scriptural allusions. The

1 Arnold Bennett - Clayhanger. Ch.V.

2 Hansard 3rd. series. Vol. LXII. p. 1376-81.

New Testament is an obvious armoury of strategic texts for those who seek to support a personal social theory with the sanctions of a religious faith. Unfortunately for the users, this method is capable of great adaptation and has on many occasions been used by the holders of reactionary views. This tendency to adapt certain parts of the Gospels and proclaim them with the thunder of Old Testament prophets was a characteristic feature of the Chartist Movement.

Thus in the industrial North in the late "thirties", and the early "forties" the Chartist Movement was inextricably bound up with the Poor Law Struggle. It was hatred of the new Poor Law above all else that turned Chartism with its purely political programme into a mass movement of the working classes. Chartism, said Joseph Rayner Stephens, the leader of the Lancashire movement against the new Poor Law, was "a knife and fork question" - a question of wages and living conditions, though the six points of the Charter were silent on economic grievances. It was the success of the workers' agitation in delaying the operation of the "New Poor Law" in some Lancashire towns, which spurred the Chartist leaders to apply the same technique to the securing of other benefits with which the Charter was concerned.

II. ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE.

Practically at the same time as the Chartists were mixed up with the Poor Law agitation, they found their whole

movement deeply affected by the tactics of the Anti-Corn Law League.

When 1836 opened, the country appeared to be recovering from the post-war depression, food was cheap, though the position of the farmers gave cause for concern. In April of that year, Lord Chandos moved in the House of Commons that some concession be made to the farmers, and a Committee to inquire into the causes of agricultural distress was appointed.¹ By the end of the year, however, the price of wheat had risen from 38s. to 80s. a quarter, and as a result the Anti-Corn Law Association was founded in London.²

Once again, however, though a movement of revolt had been initiated in London, its real headquarters and major sphere of operation were to be in Lancashire. The Industrial North provided the most favourable soil in which the doctrine of free trade could take root. For one thing, an enormous proportion of the volume of British exports consisted of Lancashire goods, and for another the county had to import from abroad practically all her raw materials. The advocates of Protection were constantly insisting upon the danger to which a country was exposed in time of war if she depended too much on foreign markets for her food supply. The argument had little weight in Lancashire. The county's industrial prosperity was dependent

¹ Hansard. 3rd series, Vol. XXXIII. pp.333 et seq.

² A. Prentice. "History of the Anti-Corn Law League". Vol.1. pp.49-50.

on a constant supply of materials from overseas. Consequently when Richard Cobden, in two pamphlets published in 1835 and 1836, expounded a new foreign policy, based on free trade and thorough-going pacifism, he was speaking for the whole trade from which he drew his wealth.¹ For Lancashire was obliged to purchase abroad, not only her cotton, but also the corn which was an essential part of the real wages of her workmen, and therefore played a dominant part in determining the total cost of manufacture.

In February 1838 the "Manchester Times" published an important article in which the writer (Prentice) lamented that the workmen wasted so much time and money in useless agitation for a reduction of the working day, an increase in wages and the repeal of the Poor Law, and urged them instead to make "one combined and energetic effort against the landowners' monopoly."² He could, however, easily excuse the ignorance of the cotton spinners when he called to mind the disgusting apathy displayed by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. Not once during the two previous years had they raised their voice against the monopoly which was destroying British Trade. On Feb. 13th (1838) the Chamber of Commerce suddenly issued a declaration stating that the injustice of the present system must be constantly brought to the notice

1 Cobden - England, Ireland and America (Works, vol.1.pp.31-2

2 A. Prentice - "History of the Anti-Corn Law League", pp.58-9

of Parliament, and demanding the repeal of the Corn Laws.¹
The issue was now clearly joined.

At first the reaction of many Chartists was favourable. Ebenezer Elliott, the poet of the movement, was almost ^{a.s.} the enthusiastic for Free Trade as he was for Chartism. In Lancashire 22,000 handloom weavers, probably under the direct instigation of a group of agitators, signed a petition for the repeal of the Corn Laws. This initial success, combined with the fact that in August 1838 a bad harvest made a winter famine inevitable, decided the promoters of the Anti-Corn Law League to launch a great campaign.

On the face of it Free Trade was a more attractive programme than the Chartist manifesto. The Chartists had as their goal a "manhood suffrage" which they declared would lead to all kinds of benefits, but which in itself did nothing to improve the material conditions of the poor. The free traders, without troubling themselves with political claims, promised the poor an immediate and tangible boon, cheap bread. The very anxiety of the employers to give this boon to the people aroused the suspicion of the workers, and the opposition to the Anti-Corn Law League grew daily among the Chartists. In February 1839, "The Chartist" wrote strongly in favour of Free Trade as the only way of saving England from the fate of Holland. In March the paper criticised the Corn Law repealers as thirty or forty

gentlemen representing themselves and their own breeches' pockets, unlikely to make an impression on the selfishness of the landlords. In the same month it argued that the stubborn resistance of the House of Lords ought to convince the middle classes that Repeal was only to be obtained by combining with the Chartists.¹

Gammage, the historian of the Movement, believed that Chartists who opposed the Anti-Corn Law League might be divided into three groups: the masses who simply distrusted the employers and all the legislation formed by them; the followers of William Lovett who favoured Free Trade but wanted the Charter first and felt that this was intended to side-track them; and the faction of J. Brereton O'Brien and Feargus O'Connor who feared² that Free Trade meant lower wages and greater power for the manufacturers.² This antagonism of the masses, on whose behalf, at least ostensibly, the League was launched, was freely admitted by Richard Cobden. He referred on one occasion to the intriguers who had excited the Chartists to agitate against the League, and added "I have no objection in admitting here, as I have admitted frankly before, that these artifices and manoeuvres have, to a considerable extent, compelled us to make our agitation a middle-class agitation. I do not deny that the working-classes generally have attended our lectures and signed our petitions, but I will admit, that so far as the fervour and

¹ Gammage. - History of the Chartist Movement (p.102-4)

² Life of Richard Cobden - John Morley. p.248-9.

efficiency of our agitation has gone, it has been eminently a middle-class agitation."¹

The Anti-Corn Law agitation, however, is important for another reason, for the Nonconformists threw themselves into the repeal movement. At one meeting no less than 700 Nonconformist ministers sat on the platform. An issue had arisen, unlike that of Chartism, on which Nonconformists could take the side of the poor without disturbing the unity or peace of their organisation. It was this agitation which helped to give Nonconformity its hold on the village labourers. In the final struggle in the House of Lords, Bishops Thirlwell and Wilberforce made two of the best speeches on behalf of Repeal, and the bishops voted for Repeal by 15 to 9,² but in the main the Church had been either hostile or neutral.³

It would be foolish, here, to seek to disentangle all the threads in the relationship between the workers and the Anti-Corn Law League, but a real assessment of this relationship would throw a great deal of light on the social background of the first half of the nineteenth century. The movement for Repeal won the support of the more respectable, the more orthodox, and the more middle-class sections of the community. It is thus hardly surprising that it won the enthusiastic backing of a militant Nonconformity.

1. John Morley - Life of Richard Cobden. P.248-9.

2. House of Lords. 25th May 1846.
3. Cobden - House of Commons. 18th April 1842.

III. FACTORY REFORMS.

The Nonconformists gave their support to the Anti-Corn Law League; and at the same time the Church of England gave its weight to the movement for Factory Reform, advocating particularly the Ten Hours Bill. In the "thirties" all the Churches were indifferent to this cause. Speaking at Manchester in April 1833, a Bradford Clergyman (Rev. G. S. Bull), said that out of seventy clergy in Manchester only two had come out as public advocates of the Ten Hours Reform Bill. "It cannot be because they are slow to speak, for I have myself heard the eloquence of your Stowells, your¹ Newtons, and your McAlls." In the forties the "Burnley Bee," a newspaper started to oppose the Bill, complained of the leading part taken by the Church in the agitation. Canon Wray of Manchester and the vicar of Leigh prepared a petition on behalf of the Ten Hours Bill at their own expense. The Church paper, "The Guardian", gave strong support to the Bill. "We must", it said, "have a time to eat and a time to sleep; a time to rise up and a time to sit down.....Nature will avenge herself for the robbery if she is defrauded by oppression and cupidity."

1. S. Kydd. ("Alfred"). "History of the Factory Movement".
Vol. II p.25.

The Nonconformists, supported in their Churches generously by the employers of the industrial North, gave little support to the Factory Reform. S. Kydd (writing under the pseudonym of Alfred) mentions only a few Nonconformist ministers as active supporters, including the famous William Dawson. Furthermore he states categorically that the support given to the movement by one Baptist minister cost him the good will of his congregation.^{1.} This is not surprising, for the "Leeds Mercury", the organ par excellence of Nonconformist politics was bitter in its condemnation of the movement. Even the religious Journal, "The Nonconformist", showed scant sympathy and slavishly followed the lead of John Bright. "The Ten Hours Bill, founded upon a vicious principle, would curtail the rights of labour without permanently increasing its comforts. It would cost the poor man too much - it would ultimately repay him nothing."^{2.}

In both agitations the Wesleyan Methodist Church was neutral and when her leaders were forced to face up to the situation, tended to be hostile to these democratic movements. The denominational newspaper, "The Watchman", dismissed all such questions as irrelevant to the Church, declaring that

1. S. Kydd (Alfred) - History of the Factory Movement.
p.224-230.

2. The Nonconformist - May 27th. 1846.

the purpose which was of supreme importance was that of infusing as much as possible of the old Protestant spirit - the spirit of our Reformers - into the next Representative Assembly of our Land.^{1.} Still, on a broad generalisation, it is possible to say with the Hammonds that "the Nonconformist clergy befriended the poor against the landowners; the Church clergy befriended the poor against the manufacturer."^{2.} These two movements, by bringing the Nonconformists and the Established Church into politics on the side of the poor, in one or other of their struggles with the employers, helped to save the working-classes from turning away "en masse" from organised religion.

Whatever the divisions of the Chartists themselves on the question of "Free Trade", they were completely unanimous in demanding action *by* the State to control industry for the protection of labour. All reforms were vigorously and often unscrupulously opposed by a large majority of the factory owners. This opposition by the employers began to assume a formidable aspect in the Autumn of 1838 and a demonstration on a colossal scale was arranged in Manchester for September 25th. There was scarcely a village in Lancashire that did not contribute its quota to the assembly of about 300,000 persons who demonstrated their determination to have the Charter become

1. The Watchman, June 3rd. 1846.

2. J. L. and B. Hammonds - The Age of the Chartists. p.289.

the law of the land. Practically all workshops and factories throughout the district closed, too few employees being available for work to continue. Hundreds of banners and flags were carried, many of them bearing mottoes and illustrations of a threatening nature, the favourite being a drawing of the Peterloo massacre with the inscription "Murder demands justice." Another common device represented a hand grasping a dagger, and bore the grim inscription, "O Tyrants! will you force us to this?" A spirit of enthusiasm pervaded the assembly and the threat of forceful vengeance drew thunderous applause. The meeting was presided over by John Fielden, "the largest cotton spinner in England" and popular advocate of factory reform, and among the speakers were the great orators of the movement - J.R. Stephens and Feargus O'Connor.

The two main wings of the factory agitation were in Lancashire and Yorkshire, but between these was a real and practical distinction. The Yorkshire factory workers gained their main weight of support from the Tories, and were fiercely opposed by the great mass of the Whig and Liberal manufacturers. Thus Trevelyan declares that in Yorkshire it was to some extent a Radical and Tory Coalition², while it is certainly true that their two great leaders Oastler and Sadler were both prominent in the Tory party organisation.

1. G.M. Trevelyan - English Social History p.543.

2. Trevelyan - *ibid* p 541 et seq.

In Lancashire, on the other hand, the middle-class friends of the operatives, such as John Fielden and Charles Hindley, were to be found among the Radical reforming group of members of Parliament. G. H. D. Cole concludes that this difference was due to the more mature conditions of the cotton industry, which caused some of the well-established manufacturers to favour regulation as a protection against unfair competition, and to the greater strength in Yorkshire of Church Toryism and in Lancashire of somewhat Radical brands of Nonconformity.¹ This does not mean of course, that the majority of Radical manufacturers in Lancashire supported factory regulation, but merely that they included a far greater number of sympathisers than was the case in the neighbouring county.

It should be noted that though the Chartists supported the Radicals who sought only to regulate the labour of women and children, their reasons were much wider than mere humanitarianism. The cheapness of child labour and the simplicity of factory machinery endangered the working man's own job, or at least his previous standard of wages by forcing him to compete with his own children in the labour market. But even/^{more} the children worked as helpers or auxiliaries to men in the

1. G.D.H. Cole - Chartist Portraits p. 12.

same establishment and any easing of the burden would automatically limit the working hours of the adults. In fact one writer has so emphasised this aspect as to write - "The operatives were seeking a restriction of working hours for themselves, not for the children who were very often the victims of their brutality rather than of the employers' tyranny."^{1.} It was for the children that Oastler and Fielden and the rest sought to awaken the pity of the English middle class, but the Chartist aim was the legal protection of the adult worker.^{2.} Many middle class humanitarians were won by the appeal on behalf of the children, but refused to accept the Reform, because of the loss of man-power hours such a concession would involve. The Ten Hours Bill was actually passed in 1847, the crisis which ensured the success of the agitation coinciding with the repeal of the Corn Laws. Thus two of the campaigns indirectly associated with Chartism, had a successful issue and their success may have represented in some measure society's compromise with the Chartists.

1. Elie Halévy - A History of the English People. (Trans. E.I. Watkin 1927) p.111.

2. Factories Inquiry Commission. First Report of Central Board of Commissioners. p.47.

Other contemporary movements naturally played their part, and if Robert Owen's grandiose dream in 1834 of a "Grand National Consolidated Trade Union" had proved a practical reality, Chartism might never have been born. It is noteworthy that one of the causes of the final disappearance of Chartism was the revival of the Trade Union Movement in 1845.

Chartism never became a clear and logical demand for any particular reform; for it sprang from people whose social conditions were too chaotic to have the remedies reduced to a few specific aims. In the Chartist era, working men and women tended to give their allegiance to any leader who could express their burning sense of injustice and was willing to advocate radical changes in the social structure. Some leaders advised them to go forward, others like J.R. Stephens advocated a return to some golden age in the past. Some appealed to the ambitions of the Trade-Union movement; others to the memories of the peasant. The "key-word" was change, for the proletariat had come to the point when he felt a change of any sort must inevitably be for the better.

For this reason Chartism is interlinked with all the great movements for reform which characterised the early nineteenth century, and most of the workers' crusade movements of the second half of the century sprang from it. To regard

Chartism as a series of isolated revolutionary incidents, as a sporadic movement which appeared suddenly and died in a few years, is to misread the history of the time. The chief feature of the years which preceded it and of the era itself is the growth and prevalence of discontent. No doubt the discontent sprang from a wide variety of causes; the migration of rural workers to town and factory life; the change-over from a domestic system to the arduous discipline of the mill; the pressure from time to time of mass unemployment unrelieved by any remedy; and the initial hardships of the Poor Law Amendment Act. But if its general character is to be described "it was discontent, excited by the philosophy^{1.} of life of which the new town was the symbol and the expression"

Chartism was linked with the religious, moral and educational development of a people seeking, albeit incoherently and almost unconsciously, to create a type of society which would harmonise with the vast new schemes of life springing from the Industrial Revolution. In the pursuit of this adjustment, Lancashire workers were swept into one movement after another as their imagination was captured first by this gospel, then by that. It was an age for the orator, for any man whose golden tongue promised relief from the intolerable industrial conditions possessed a magnetic power of leadership. "Every appeal", declared Vincent, "to the intellect

1. J.L. & B. Hammond. - "The Age of the Chartists" p.274.

and virtue of the masses is most cordially responded to." The leaders of the Chartist Movement were divided on many questions but they were at one in their recognition that if the people are to be roused, their imagination must first be fired. After 1848, this force which Chartism had released in the minds of the workers was not lost; it found new channels for expression, such as the Trade Union Movements, the agitation for the increase of educational facilities, the Temperance Movement, and the great campaigns for the widening of the franchise. It was for this reason that John Stuart Mill characterised the historical influence of Chartism as "the victory of the vanquished".^{1.} Long after the fiasco of Kennington Common in 1848, the spirit of Chartism was exercising a truly democratic influence on the gradual recasting of English social life.

It was not only a movement with a religious bias; like the great ideologies of this century it did, in fact, become the religion of many people. Like Fascism and Communism it is only in such a setting that it can be really understood.

1. Quoted by James Brown in the "Indian Journal of Economics" April 1930.

Chapter II

Phases of Chartism.

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Phases of Chartism.

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Of the movements enumerated in the previous Chapter, it was the agitation against the Poor Law which provided the ideal foundation for the leaders of the Chartist Movement. In the waging of this campaign the workers of Lancashire developed the technique of revolution which was used in the much more ambitious battle for the Charter. Before Lovett had drafted the "People Charter", and before Joseph Sturge had taken up the theme for Birmingham, Feargus O'Connor with a keen scent for unrest had been stirring up the people of the North. It was no accident that "The Northern Star" became the leading newspaper of the movement, since it was in the North, and especially in Lancashire, that Chartism really caught fire. Even by 1848, the year of the great debacle, it had failed to stir up any appreciable enthusiasm among the workers of London. The Chartists were, in the main, products of hunger and despair; and since the workers of the Metropolis were, on the whole, better paid than those in other parts of the country, such utter grinding poverty was comparatively rare.

Even in Lancashire, however, interest did not remain at white heat during the years in which the Chartists were most active. The agitation was a revolt, not against a particular injustice, but against the general injustice of the whole economic and political system. It was not the momentary outbreak of a misguided mob, but the expression, over nearly two decades, of working-class discontent, rising to three peak points in 1839, 1842, and 1848 - when giant petitions were prepared and presented to Parliament. The strength of the agitation ebbed and flowed with the fluctuations of overseas trade, with the expansion of the railways - in fact, with the whole process of industrialisation; and, in addition, was influenced by such natural phenomena as the vicissitudes of harvests and by those unpredictable events which punctuate any Movement of the human spirit. Its movements of crisis came when circumstances turned the attention of the majority of the workers to the Charter, and their obvious numerical strength compelled the Government to take drastic and repressive action.

Chartism, then, may be regarded as consisting of three distinct phases. The first was characterised by John Frost's abortive attack at Newport in 1839, by great open-air demonstrations and by Parliament's rejection of the first "Great Petition". The middle period culminated in the wide-

spread strikes of August 1842 when, for a short time, nearly all the factories in Lancashire were at a standstill.

The third and final phase reached its climax in the ill-fated demonstration of April 10th, 1848, when London was garrisoned by an army of special constables, to prevent disorder in connection with the Chartist petition to Parliament. The three major crises coincided with times of desperate economic depression and of severe suffering by the poorest sections of the community.

I. THE FIRST PHASE.

It is a commonplace of historical observation that revolutionary movements tend to divide themselves into two parties - in the first there are those who are prepared to use physical force, and in the second those who confine their plans of campaign to methods of moral persuasion. Chartism in industrial Lancashire was mainly of the physical-force variety, though G.H.D. Cole claims that Manchester groups were more moderate in their methods, and more in sympathy with the idealistic Owenism of the originators of the "London Working Men's Association."¹

1. G.D.H. Cole - Chartist Portraits p.12.

Lovett, who originally published "The People's Charter", and many of his supporters, were educated men, and had ^{an} ardent belief in education and in the power of reason. When the six points were continually set before them as the sum total of human happiness, is it any cause for surprise that the Lancashire operatives decided to gain the Charter, whether by means of direct action or moral persuasion?

In the early days, quite unwittingly, the authorities played into their hands. The Chartists were denied the use of the large, commodious halls, and their long hours of work made day-light open-air gatherings practically impossible. By a stroke of genius their leaders capitalised this difficulty and arranged a series of picturesque and effective torch-light processions in the industrial centres of Bolton, Hyde, Leigh, Stockport and Stalybridge. Such demonstrations probably brought together more people than could have been attracted by any other means, for the darkness conferred an anonymity on individuals taking part which would be some protection against victimisation. They had about them a glamour and pageantry which exercised an inevitable fascination over the minds of people condemned to a dull and colourless existence.

Usually the affair began with a march through the main streets of the town, the section-leaders carrying banners

derisive of the local manufacturers and magistrates. The torch-light procession held at Hyde on Nov. 14th 1838, stabbed the government wide awake to the dangers inherent in such gatherings. The company was addressed by J.R. Stephens who, surrounded by groups of men wearing red caps of liberty, branded the mill-owners as a gang of murderers whose blood must flow before the demands of justice could be met. He advised every one of his hearers to get "a large carving knife which might be used to cut either a rashier of bacon or the men who opposed their demands." In point of fact thousands of people in all parts of the country began to manufacture arms, and the Manchester delegate to the Palace Yard demonstration in London declared the people of the North were armed, that he himself had been¹ in the homes of the poor and had found weapons in readiness.

Though they recognised the danger, the Cabinet seemed unable to agree on any definite policy. This air of indecision is reflected in a speech which Lord John Russell delivered in Liverpool in the Autumn of 1838. "There were", he asserted, "some who would put down such meetings, but such was not his opinion, nor that of the Government with which he acted. He thought the people had a right to

1. Gammage - Op. cit p.52

meet. If they had no grievances, common sense would speedily come to the rescue and put an end to these meetings. It was not from free discussion, it was not from the unchecked declaration of public opinion that Government had anything to fear. The real danger lay in driving men to the formation of secret societies." ^{1.} Hardly had these truly democratic senti-

ments travelled round the country, before Lord John Russell requested the magistrates of Lancashire to declare the torch-light processions illegal. ^{2.} Denied such public demonstrations of their growing strength, the whole situation was reviewed by a "General Convention of the Industrial Classes" which opened in London on Feb. 4th 1839.

The Chartist delegates were fifty in number and all of them were not working men. The delegates included three J.P.'s, representatives of the democratic magistrates appointed by Lord John Russell, six journalists, two doctors, a Nonconformist minister, a clergyman of the Established Church - the eccentric Dr. Wade - a wealthy Birmingham manufacturer and a few tradesmen. ^{3.} Here again Lancashire leaps to the forefront, for probably the most telling speech of the whole debate was

1. a) Quoted in "The Chartist Movement" - Frank F. Rosenblatt p.149-150. (Columbia University Press 1916)
b) See also "The Age of Reform" - E.L.Woodward p.141.

2. The Magistrates took action on 22nd November 1838.

3. H. Hovell - "The Chartist Movement" pp.121 - 122.

delivered by Richard Marsden, the representative from Preston. It owed its strength to its personal and human appeal, for it was neither the objective statement of a social investigator, nor the highly seasoned oration of a political candidate, but a genuine cry of despair. It evoked a dangerous sympathy in the minds of all who read or heard his story. To drive home the evils of the factory system and the inhumanity of the conditions of employment Marsden presented the case of his own wife and children, who were entirely destitute of the bare necessities of life. With an infant at her breast, his wife was so emaciated by lack of nourishment that, when the baby tried to suckle, it drew the mother's blood.¹

The delegates had been elected primarily as bearers of a petition to Parliament. James Cobbett (a son of the famous Cobbett) and one of the two delegates from Manchester argued that the Convention had no authority to discuss any question other than the speediest and most effective method of having the petition presented in the House of Commons. This contention was rejected, for it was decided that weeks must elapse before that could be achieved. Moreover, when the delegates examined the petitions entrusted to their care,

1. Gamage - Op. cit p.108.

they found that the total number fell far short of their target. They had expected 1,000,000 signatures, they had received only 600,000. Under these circumstances they decided to send 'Emissaries' up and down the country to obtain further signatures.

The problem arose - what was the Convention to do in the waiting period? The more revolutionary members mentioned that since the delegates had been freely elected at public meetings by a body of electors more numerous than the Parliamentary electorate, the Convention constituted the only Parliament in England with valid credentials, the true "People's Parliament". This extreme claim caused a split and several of the delegates resigned, including the clergyman, Dr. Wade. The departure of the more moderate leaders, tended only to strengthen the power of the "physical force" section, which was further strengthened by reports of armed preparations being made in Lancashire. At Middleton (near Manchester) shots were fired every night by way of demonstration. At Rochdale the Radical Association had decided to furnish its members with pikes, guns, powder and bullets. There were, it was reported 4,000 armed men at Rochdale, 6,000 at Oldham and 30,000 in the four towns of Hyde¹, Ashton, Newton Moore, and Stalybridge.

1. Hallévy - A History of the English People 1830 - 1841.



By degrees the extremists captured the Convention and in an atmosphere of dangerous threats the work of collecting signatures for the Petition (drawn up originally by R.K. Douglas, the editor of the "Birmingham Journal") went on. By the end of April 1,280,000 signatures had been collected and five hundred public meetings had been addressed by the "emissaries" in over 200 towns and villages. Even if it is admitted that a percentage of the signatures were fraudulent, it is still more than likely that it represented a far more numerous constituency than did the House of Commons.

On May 6th, the National Petition was taken to the residence of Thomas Attwood, a Member of Parliament who had promised to present it in the House of Commons. Unfortunately this gentleman's enthusiasm for the Charter had waned and he sought to make the unexpected resignation of the Melbourne Government a pretext for delay. This unforeseen blow, compelled the leaders to change the location of the Convention. By July 1st arrangements had been made for the Convention to re-assemble in Birmingham. By this time much support had been gained throughout the country for the holding of a "sacred month", that is to say, for a general strike to compel the Government to give a favourable reception to the Petition. Discussion on this matter was deferred until after the Petition

had been presented to Parliament, and on July 10th the members returned to London. By this time it was realised that the Charter was unlikely to become the law of the land overnight, and the leaders without doubt prepared privately for the strike. For the moment the courage of the Convention matched the opposition of the Government.

On July 12th Attwood finally presented the petition at Westminster, but his speech was half-hearted and devoid of inspiration.¹ Replying on behalf of the Government, Lord John Russell had no difficulty in tearing his feeble argument to pieces, though as Disraeli (echoing Carlyle) remarked, "the noble lord had answered the speech of the honourable member for Birmingham, but he had not answered the Chartists."² The debate concluded with a division of 48 votes in favour as against 237 in opposition to Attwood's motion.

Next day the Convention met and issued a "Declaration" that the "Sacred Month" would begin on August 12th. At Birmingham where for many days excitement had run high, riots broke out on July 15th, and practically all the shops in the main centres were looted. Vigorous official

1 Hansard Vol.XLIX p.220-256.

2 Ibid.

action was taken immediately, and in the course of a few days over 550 arrests were made in various parts of the country.¹ This repressive measure, far from stimulating the Convention to action, caused the movement to collapse.

On July 16th the Convention adopted a futile resolution declaring themselves unable to advise a strike, because the trade-unions had refused co-operation.² Thus Aug.12th passed without any serious disorders and on Sept.6th the Convention declared itself dissolved. At a banquet, given in Edinburgh in October, Whig statesmen declared that Chartism had been destroyed "by the good sense of the country" and indeed "had vanished into smoke."³ This phase had a miserable extension in Frost's pathetic rising at Newport early in November and in the arrest at Ashton-under-Lyne in December of the redoubtable J.R.Stephens.

Though a certain number of Nonconformist ministers were sympathetic to the Chartists in the early days, as soon as revolutionary tendencies were displayed they lined up solidly with the Government. At the Annual meeting of the Congregational Union on June 3rd 1839, the Rev.John Angell James, referred to a three days solemn conference of 40 ministers, in which no reference at all had been made to such public questions as the Chartist Agitation.⁴

1 F. Rosenblatt - op. cit. pp.20 5-6

2 Gamage - op. cit. p.155

3 Quarterly Review Dec.1839. Vol.XLV. p.294.

4 Report of the Congregational Union Assembly 1839.

Congregationalism was typical of Dissent: it refused to associate itself with the Charter.

II. THE MIDDLE PERIOD.

For two years the movement was, for all practical purposes, in abeyance. Even in the early months of 1841, the "Annual Register" reports that "the hopes or apprehensions of the public are no longer excited by the prospect of any further extension of political rights; the outcry for the ballot or an enlargement of the suffrage has almost ceased."¹

No one, however, can foretell the rise and wane of a popular movement, and, as the winter of 1841 approached, agitation became intense and meetings were held all over the country to collect signatures for another great National Petition, demanding the six points of the Charter, and setting forth a long list of grievances in justification of their demands. The cause of this renewed enthusiasm was the increasing misery of the working-classes. Life for them in these months became almost unendurable; and the increasing harshness in the application of the New Poor Law took away the traditional relief for times of depression. Yet in spite of all the efforts of the Commissioners, by 1842 the "poor rate" in Stockport had risen to the unprecedented height of eight shillings² in the pound.^{2.}

¹ Annual Register, Vol. LXXXIII.p.2.

² Engels - "Condition of the Working Class" p.87.

The Commissioners failed to distinguish between the distress existing in rural villages, and that prevailing in the manufacturing districts of the North. They had no conception of the new problems that were arising out of the fluctuations of employment. They did not recognise that the cyclical trade depression then, as now, was one of the chief causes of unemployment. They shared the prevailing view that poverty was the result of personal deficiency, and so they had no proposals for curing the poverty which lay at the root of these evils. The application of the New Poor Law received the support of both Whigs and Tories, for they regarded it as the only cure for a Poor Law subsidy system which was turning many British villages into colonies of paupers. The Act was, indeed, effective in abolishing the particular evil the Government had in mind, but at the cost of a cruelty which shocks the more sensitive social conscience of modern times. They claimed that they were being cruel only to be kind, but the victims were more conscious of the cruelty than of the kindness. The most revolting instance of this was the separation of married couples, even of aged married couples when they were forced into the workhouse by destitution. The people of Lancashire could always be whipped into a fury by stories of the Bastilles and of the three Commissioners responsible for their administration.

We are fortunate enough to possess a fairly reliable eye-witness account of Lancashire in 1842. Describing a journey through the county in the Spring of the year 1842, Dr. Cook Taylor writes: - "I was told in one place that there had been several instances of death by sheer starvation. On asking why application had not been made to the Parish for relief, I was informed that there were persons from agricultural districts who, on committing an act of vagrancy, would be sent to their parishes, and that they had rather endure anything in the hope of some manufacturing revival than return to the condition of farm labourers from which they had emerged. This was a fact perfectly new to me and at first blush truly incredible, but I asked the neighbours in two of the instances quoted.... and they not only confirmed the story but seemed to consider any appearance of scepticism a mark of prejudice and ignorance."¹

This description emphasises two factors of the Chartist era often ignored - the appalling misery of the agricultural labourer and the fact that, in spite of everything, industrial wages were usually better than agricultural. They give substance to a powerful jibe delivered by a supporter of the Anti-Corn Law League - as he described the life of an agricultural labourer - "What! six shillings a week for wages and the morning's sun, and the singing of birds, and

¹ Letter to the Morning Chronicle from Rossendale Forest (Lancashire) June 20, 1842.

sportive lambs and winding streams and the mountain breeze, and a little wholesome labour - six shillings a week and all this ! And nothing to do with your six shillings a week, but merely to pay your rent, buy your food, clothe yourself and your families, and lay by something for your old age ! Happy people !" ¹ The Editor of "Punch" commenting on the ill-timed remark of the Duke of Norfolk that curry-powder was very soothing in an ill-filled stomach, and on discussions that were proceeding about different kinds of diet, suggested that the landlords should hold a competition in peasants instead of in fat cattle, The catalogue might read like this: "No. 1. A short-legged Norfolk labourer. Fed on boiling water and curry powder. Walked thirty miles to the Exhibition. Bred in the Norwich workhouse. First prize." "No. 2. A Hampshire labourer. Supported entirely on starch. Brought in a cab half-a-mile to the Exhibition by Dr. Buckland. Second Prize." ² The lot of the factory operative was really very little better. Such examples as have been cited, whether exaggerations or not, show that such organs of informed opinion as "The Times" and "Punch" were conscious that such a cancer in the social life could not endure for long.

Many explanations of this misery have been given,

1 Cobden. - John Morley. Vol. I. p.210.

2 J.L. and B. Hammond. "The Age of the Chartists", p.286.

according to the prevailing fashions of thought and the temperaments of historians. Probably the most accurate picture is that of an age called upon to face new problems without any preparation for them in the ideas of the time, and without any precedents for dealing with them. The men of that age were called upon to create a new order while still busily engaged in putting an end to the old, and the methods which helped them to put an end to the old order made it more difficult for them to realise the needs of the new. One of the most popular weapons was the philosophy of self-help as formulated by Samuel Smiles. If the age was characterised by misery, it was characterised no less by the courageous efforts to deal with it, and, side by side, with the most doctrinaire application of laissez-faire economics, were developed the first efforts at social control. But all the means by which such control could be exercised had still to be invented and put into operation. Before 1801 there were no exact statistics even of the population of the country. It is not surprising, therefore, that the solutions of the problem of the misery of the period were many and varied.

In 1842, misery had reached its lowest depths. Evidence of this is seen in the fact that the monster petition which was now prepared completely eclipsed that of 1839. In the earlier attempt, just over one million and a quarter

signatures had been secured, whereas 3,315,752 persons¹ signed the second petition. There is no reason to suppose it contained more fraudulent signatures than that of 1839. Thus in three years there had been an increase of 150%. On May 2nd 1842, Thomas Dunscombe presented it to Parliament and it became the target of fierce and bitter criticism. Though it found some unexpected support, it was eventually² defeated by 287 to 49 - a clear majority of 238.

In spite of all their bold speeches, this repeated and rather pathetic petitioning is an indication that the Chartists would much rather have achieved their purpose in constitutional and peaceful ways than by force. In English social history it is probably true to say that more agitations have been armed with petitions than with pikes; the tradition goes back to Wat Tyler. But by this time many of the Chartists were convinced that they could not by mere petitioning, however great their numbers, achieve any of their demands. The two great traditional parties in the House of Commons were divided on many issues, but they were at one in their fear of a militant working-class movement like Chartism. Their attitude here, of course, merely reflected the mind of the enfranchised classes which they represented.

¹ Hansard. 3rd series. Vol. LXIII. p. 29.

² Hansard 3rd series. Vol. LXIII. p.13-91 gives the text of the debate.

An important aspect of the petition is that it gives reliable evidence of the geographical distribution of the Chartists, and provides irrefutable proof that Lancashire was the great stronghold, Manchester alone contributing nearly 100,000 signatures while South Lancashire had signatures from 45 local Chartist associations.¹ Not all the supporters of the petition were, in the strictest sense, active members of the Chartist party, but Dunscombe estimated that "nearly 100,000 adults of the industrious portion of the community lay aside one penny per week of their wages for the purpose of carrying on and keeping up agitation ~~in~~ ^{"2} ~~agitation~~ in favour of their claim to the elective franchise.

With the rejection of the second petition, there came a deep sense of frustration; discontent became keener and its expression more violent. An example of this new spirit was the great mass meeting at Enfield Moor near Blackburn on June 5th when many of the men carried firearms and one of the speakers, Marsden of Bolton, won resounding applause by threatening to lead an "armed deputation" to Buckingham Palace in support of the Charter. By an unfortunate confusion some writers have found an integral connection between this more militant phase of Chartism and the causes of the great August strike of 1842. Actually the strike began as a straight-forward protest against wage reduction,

¹ Ibid.

² Hansard - 3rd. Series. Vol. LXIII. p.20.

and it was only later that the Chartists stepped in and used it for their own political purposes. To understand it, we have to go back to the beginning of 1841. All through 1841-42 there had been a fearful economic crisis. The harvest almost everywhere in Europe had failed, and the prices of the basic foodstuffs continued to rise steeply. This depression had been felt very keenly indeed, by the operatives in the textile trades. Unemployment alternated with brief periods of employment, while wages were cut and cut again far below the barest subsistence level. Industrial warfare flickered uncertainly on every coalfield, and the rising in the cotton textile area of Lancashire, merely brought matters to a head.

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The strike itself began at Ashton on Aug. 4th and 5th. During the following week armed mobs invaded Manchester and the other big factory towns. In the meantime great demonstrations at Mottram Moor and Haigh (near Stalybridge) had fired with the workers with enthusiasm. At these gatherings the men solemnly resolved "never to resume work until the Charter should become the law of the land." The mob had been infused with a purpose, and wherever they went they turned out the operatives, forced many to abandon work against their will, and intimidated a curiously inactive authority by putting out the fires of steam

engines and drawing plugs from the boilers. It was this latter activity which gave to the whole affair the name of the 'Plug Riots'. Contemporary reports placed the number of men thrown out of work by the great turn-out as from fifty to eight thousand.¹ Serious riots occurred at Preston and Stockport, but on the whole the strike, considering its extent, produced little actual strife and disorder. A typical report from Rochdale on August 15th, declares that a few boys made a nuisance of themselves, entering shops and begging in a threatening manner, but their elders speedily controlled them.² The textile operatives published their demands on the 25th, and these included a ten-hour day, wage scales based on the rates existing in 1840, and the payment of wages weekly.³

It was a mere coincidence that the Chartist Conference had arranged for a meeting of all its delegates in Manchester on August 17th, a decision taken long before the strike was even contemplated, or events had indicated its nearness. The object of their gathering was to make joint arrangements throughout the country to celebrate the martyrdom of Henry Hunt and the victims of the "Peterloo Massacre". The members arrived in Manchester on August 16th to find the industrial life of the city brought to a standstill and the streets filled with excited workers constantly being

1 Times - August 12th, 1842.

2 Times - August 17th, 1842.

3 Times - August 26th, 1842.

prevented from holding mass meetings by troupes of cavalry which patrolled the main streets. They discovered that a conference of Lancashire and Yorkshire Trade Union Delegates had just been dissolved by the magistrates, but not before, with very few dissentients, they had agreed to maintain the strike until the Charter had become law. This appears to conflict with Julius West's strange assertion that the Chartist leaders discouraged¹ the participation of their followers in Trade Unions. In fact, one of the major motives of Chartism was to reach the Trade Union objective by a short cut. It seems much more likely that in most areas there was complete accord between the two, and often complete identification.

Learning from the experience of the Trade Unionists, the Chartist delegates met secretly in a chapel to discuss, not the Peterloo celebrations, but this rising unexpectedly forced upon them. The prestige of the Conference was at stake. Quite clearly events compelled them to lend their support in organising a nation-wide stoppage and they dispersed to their own districts with that purpose in view. Their efforts, however, were of no avail, for the resources of the strikers soon came to an end. In the latter part of August and throughout September, desperate privation drove the strikers back to the factories, without gaining

1 Julius West - "History of the Chartist Movement" p.186.

2 T.A.Jackson - "Trials of British Freedom". p.132.

their objects or, at best, having reached some face-saving compromise with the local employers. Before the end of September, the "Stockport Chronicle" reported that the whole¹ of the strikers had returned to work.

One of the most significant events in the last days of the strike was the sudden switch over in the editorial policy of the Chartist newspaper "The Northern Star". Feargus O'Connor suddenly withheld his support and declared the strike to be part of a planned attack of the mill-owners in support of the Anti-Corn Law League. Engels seems to feel that there was a measure of truth in this, and the complaisance of the employers during the strike indicated that a general cessation of production was not entirely disagreeable to them. Furthermore such a rising, they knew, would do much to force the hand of the Protectionist majority in the House of Commons. Early in 1842 Cobden had suggested a refusal of taxes and Bright a general closure of factories, as a possible means of bringing pressure to bear upon the government. The manufacturers having few orders,^{were} willing to let their factories remain idle for a few weeks; and furthermore they were content to let the scanty financial resources of the strikers determine the length of the dispute.

¹ Cited in "The Times" Sept. 29th, 1842.

The strike, however, was far from being the complete failure such a cursory reading of the course of events would seem to suggest. It provided a rough and ready guide to the extent of the misery in working-class homes and the dangers inherent in such a situation if measures to relieve it were not speedily taken. The "Stockport Chronicle" gave as its opinion that never before in history had there been "a cessation of labour so extensive, simultaneous and protracted", while "The Times" reported that never since Chartism became known had it been so completely organised.² Even more indicative of the unexpected strength of the workers is the fact that although the authorities remained comparatively inactive during the strike, as soon as it was over they took the most vigorous action. Almost immediately fifteen hundred national and local leaders were arrested on all kinds of charges; among these were a few lads of fifteen, and one man of 101. Some 800 were dealt with by the magistrates in courts of summary jurisdiction, while 710 appeared before the Assizes in Lancaster, Liverpool, Chester, Stafford and York. The first cases to be tried were savagely dealt with; sentences of twenty years transportation and five years imprisonment being inflicted on various arson charges. Public opinion made no move to

¹ Cited in the Times. Sept. 29th, 1842.

² Times - Aug. 12th, 1842.

have these brutal sentences reduced. Feargus O'Connor and fifty-eight other delegates to the Manchester Conference, succeeded in having their trials delayed till the excitement¹ had died down, and received much lighter sentences.

III THE FINAL PHASE

After 1842 the Chartist agitation lost its force, although it was to prove capable of being stirred into another large blaze. A number of causes contributed to this decline, particularly the success achieved by two contemporary movements. The Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 removed a sense of injustice in a dramatic manner and helped to produce a great expansion of trade, which eased the hardships of town life. The passing of the Ten Hours Act in 1847 was even more important as an influence on the imagination of the poor. Thus food was made cheaper for the poor and they were given a right to a share in the culture and leisure enjoyed by other classes. In addition to trade revival there were well-subsidised plans of emigration, and a rapid expansion in railway construction. Quite automatically these tended to relieve distress, to remove key-leaders into new districts where they had no following, and to

1 T. A. Jackson - op cit. p.134 ff.

break up established lines of communication by a redistribution of population. An even more important factor, though one often ignored, is the sudden limelight shed on the dissension of the leaders when the tension was eased, and the tempo of the agitation slowed down.

Though the greatest single factor in the decline of Chartism was the renewed economic prosperity of the country, there were parts of Lancashire where the depression continued and the misery of the people abated very little. In a quotation from the Lancashire Congregational Union Report of 1844, Dr. Nightingale reveals something of the uncertainty in which thousands of people were condemned to live their lives. To be sure of employment the majority of the people had to leave the villages. "Belmont is suffering through the stoppage of the paintworks in which a great part of the people depended for a livelihood. The consequence is that many of the members of the Church and attendants at the Chapel have been obliged to leave the neighbourhood and seek employment elsewhere and the village itself is¹ greatly impoverished."

It was doubtless to depressed areas of this type that Chartism owed its renewed strength in 1846. A significant sign of this revival was the presentation in Parliament, on

¹ Benjamin Nightingale - Lancashire Nonconformity p.80.

March 10th (1846) of 249 petitions containing altogether 1,400,000 signatures, asking for the release from prison of Frost, Jones¹ and Williams, who had been sentenced for their share in the Monmouth insurrection of 1839. Throughout the winter of 1847-8 the evidence of discontent increased. When the news of the Paris revolt reached England at the end of February, the Chartists at once became aggressive. On March 6th, 1848, a crowd of 10,000 persons met in Trafalgar Square in defiance of the authorities and there was a similar demonstration in Manchester.

April 10th was fixed as the day for a gigantic demonstration and Feargus O'Connor claimed that a petition with 5,700,000 signatures would be presented to Parliament. There is little call to record the events of that day or to describe in any detail the reasons which turned such a well-engineered and planned demonstration into a fiasco. The story is written in almost any history of the period. London prepared for a siege and was garrisoned by 170,000² special constables. Napoleon III, then a refugee in London, served as a special constable and was able to make a comparison between revolution in London and revolution in Paris. Kennington Common had

1. Hansard, 3rd. series. Vol. LXXXIV P. 287.

been selected as the meeting-place, and a colossal number of people was expected to gather. Estimates of the actual number vary from 75,000 to 150,000. The place was so well guarded that the projected march to Parliament was never~~made~~, the Petition, amid general derision, being taken to the House of Commons in three cabs. On April 13th the select Committee on public petitions made its report to the House of Commons, and declared that the actual number of signatures was 1,975,946, many of which were in the same writing and others were quite obviously fictitious or forgeries. (e.g. the names of Queen Victoria and Mr. Punch appeared). Thus the actual petitions contained a bare three-fifths of the names collected in 1842.

As before, the crisis ended in repressive measures and trials for sedition. In May there were riots in Lancashire and McDouall, arrested at Ashton in July, received a sentence of two years hard labour. On Aug. 14th a mob armed with pikes and firearms rose at Ashton, and murdered a policeman before it could be put down. The Assizes in Liverpool resulted in^{1.} many further sentences to transportation or imprisonment. Similar repressive measures were at once applied wherever rioting occurred, so that by the end of 1848, insurrectionary Chartism was finally crushed. These savage sentences were

1. Gammage - op.cit. p.337-41.

received in silence, for the final riots and disorders had behind them practically no popular approval.

It is probable that during the whole ten years of its real life the average middle-class Englishman had only the haziest idea of what Chartism stood for; being sure only that it was evil and should for that reason be avoided. Like his modern counterpart he dealt with all such movements by giving them names, such as lawless democrats, rationalists and pagans. According to Henry Solly, for any young man of education to link himself with the Chartists was to commit social suicide; it entailed the loss of countless friends and very often the loss of his means of livelihood.^{2.} In its European context this is easy to understand, for to an England alarmed by Continental revolutionary movements the Chartist symbolised terrifying innovations of political freedom; to a country clinging desperately to Christian education as a bulwark against tremendous social changes, he advocated a State rather than a Church system of education, and, in the teeth of the Oxford Movement, he spoke of the disestablishment of the Church of England.^{3.}

1. See Joseph Parker - A Preacher's Life p.16.

2. Henry Solly - These Eighty Years Vol I. p. 397-8.

3. G. J. Holyoake - Bygones worth Remembering. Vol. 1.p.81 ff

As to the Chartists themselves, many of them came to believe that, to fulfil the teachings of Christ, it would be necessary to bypass the Churches, and to conclude that in their conflict with traditional religious organisations they were fulfilling the letter of the New Testament.

After the "Kennington Common Fiasco" Chartism was merely a residue. G. H. D. Cole is probably right in saying that such organisations as persisted were mainly influenced by Marxist teaching, and were linked to the growing international working-class movement which never succeeded in making any real headway in this country. On the whole the worst effects of the transition to industry had been ironed out, and as Britain more and more became the workshop of the world, wages rose and employment became more steady. Carlyle's famous "Condition of England" question changed with changing conditions and the enthusiasm which had found expression in Chartism was now directed into numerous channels of Liberal reform. These new movements for political reform were, of course, of a less ambitious kind and had not behind them the mass drive of popular hunger and despair.

It is natural that historians, with their imagination caught by the movements that made 1848 so lurid a memory for Continental government, should dismiss lightly a revolt that had so sober a career and so small a casualty list. In Frost's revolt at Newport only fourteen men were killed and some fifty wounded. Taking into consideration the slender

provision for the maintenance of order (Manchester did not have an organised police force until 1839) it says much for the good sense of the English working-man that more violence was not attempted, and that the Newport rising was an isolated incident. Dr. Cooke-Taylor, in his descriptive work "Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire, 1842" remarks on the law-abiding character of the Lancashire poor under the most provoking circumstances. In England the working-man has always been less willing to resort to violence than his fellow on the Continent. This does not imply, however, that the Chartists were not in earnest, or that they were unwilling to run grave risks for the Cause. They had few skirmishes with troops, but they went to prison or suffered the brutality of transportation in great numbers after each great agitation.

The Chartist Movement for a period of ten years was a continuous, if incoherent protest by the worker against the place he had come to occupy in the new industrial communities of the North. This is the significance of the crusade which began in a London Working Men's Association and ended when the last Chartist Petition disappeared amid the derision of the House of Commons. Although the enthusiasm of the Chartists depended too much on circumstances, and their leadership tended to be second-rate, they had pointed the working-class back to political action and a belief in Parliament, and this tradition was fortified in later

and happier years by the memory of much heroism and self-sacrifice. When British democracy finally won the vote,^{1.} many an "old Chartist" took part in the great victory.

1. British History in the Nineteenth Century and After -
1782-1919. G. M. Trevelyan P.253.

Chapter III.

Specific Problems of Lancashire.

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To the traveller descending from the moorlands to the towns of Lancashire in the 1830's the smoke and roar of industrial life must have seemed like the smoke and roar of a battlefield and the discipline of the factories like the discipline of a great army. He would be astonished to learn that those smoking chimneys linked the county with the world. The Lancashire cotton industry received her raw materials from across the Atlantic Ocean, and sent her finished products to every part of the earth.

To understand the forces which had created this phenomenon, we must remember that these towns were the creation of immigrants, victims of a revolution beyond their understanding.

The cotton industry was brought to Lancashire as early as 1581 by Protestant refugees from the Spanish persecution in the Netherlands. Much earlier than its chief rival the woollen trade, it was transformed by the inventions of the Industrial Revolution, not because its

traditions were less strong, but because cotton was more adaptable to the new technique and because the brilliant prospects of the cotton trade made the causes for resistance weaker. The industry continued to grow slowly but steadily from the early part of the eighteenth century. After the middle of the eighteenth century the pace became more rapid and the industry grew by leaps and bounds. The Napoleonic wars, lasting almost continuously from 1793 to 1815, gave it a tremendous, if somewhat artificial, stimulus. These wars it has been said, with little exaggeration, were paid for by the expanding cotton industry. In 1781 five million pounds of raw cotton were imported; ten years later, five times as much, and in 1801 fifty-six million pounds. Such figures indicate the achievements of the Industrial Revolution.

The artificial stimulus of the wars certainly intensified the worst evils of the Industrial Revolution in Lancashire; even if they were not wholly responsible for the distress which accompanied the transition from domestic to factory industry. The expansion of the cotton trade in the Napoleonic era brought hordes of people from many parts of the country to swell the already growing towns and villages of Lancashire, and these towns developed without the physical and spiritual amenities of civilisation. Furthermore, the cotton industry offered a peculiarly

favourable field for the use of child labour. Thus all the evils of the Industrial Revolution were not only intensified but exposed to the public eye in the cotton districts. Coal miners lived under far worse conditions, but these did not attract the same popular attention. Townships like Bolton grew into towns: hamlets like Dukinfield grew into townships; new places like Gee Cross appeared on the map. Redford tells us that the census returns show that in almost all the industrial centres the migrants from elsewhere outnumbered the people born in the towns.^{1.}

Thus the cotton industry, which the moorland traveller would see in action, though not absolutely a product of the new machinery, derived thence its overriding importance. Between the accession of George III and the passing of the Reform Bill its output increased a hundredfold. By 1806 cotton accounted for nearly a third of the total British exports. The industry was concentrated in South Central Lancashire, because the port of Liverpool was convenient to a trade depending on the import of raw cotton and the export of the manufactured article; because there it was near cheap coal; and because the climate of the damp Atlantic seaboard is peculiarly suitable to fine spinning.

1. Arthur Redford - "Labour Migration in England 1800-1850"
pp.192-196.

Before the beginning of the Chartist agitation and the movement for Factory Reform life in the cotton mills was a wretched business in most places in Lancashire. Mothers and children worked from twelve to fifteen hours a day under insanitary conditions, without either the amenities of life which had relieved the monotony of family work in the home under the domestic system, or the conditions which make factory life attractive to many women today. The discipline of the early factories was like the discipline of a prison. Small children were often cruelly treated to keep them awake during the long hours, which undermined their health and more often than not drastically shortened their lives. Nor was the situation much better for the men. Often out of employment, they were forced to sell their wives and children into the slavery of the mills, while they themselves ran to seed in helpless idleness. The hand-loom weavers had flourished until the early years of the nineteenth century, weaving the increased product of the new spinning mills. But the coming of the power-loom destroyed their prosperity and in large numbers they went on the Parish rates. They remained a problem, though of decreasing importance, until passing time and death took them from the scene.

If the cotton industry showed England the way into some of the worst miseries of the industrial revolution, it also showed the way out, because it passed most rapidly

through the period of semi-capitalised and half-organised industry, with its mean cruelties, into organised capitalism where the employers, the workers, and the State, could readily take stock of each other. So far as Lancashire was concerned the Chartist Movement played a vital part in the stocktaking.

Chartism was in a very real sense a product of the growth of the economic unit. It achieved its most resounding successes in Lancashire because it was here that the largest factories sprang into being. Once the employees had been gathered in large factories by hundreds, it was inevitable that very soon they would seek means to combine for economic and political action. Furthermore, here and there an individual factory-owner of education and enlightenment would introduce conditions in his workshops which inspectors of a later date could enforce as standards. When the age of the Factory Acts came, large factories were easier to inspect than small ones and were more readily compelled to fall into step.

An interesting example of the attitude of a middle-class Dissenter to this process is found in the life of William Grey (1809 - 1881), who was widely known in the county as a writer on politics, economics and theology. In the earlier part of his life he took an active part in the cotton industry at Bury. "With his workpeople", declared his friend John Morley, "his relations were the most friendly and he was active in trying to better their conditions - - - Lancashire was

then the scene of diligent social efforts of all kinds. Grey was an energetic member of the circle at Manchester (Richard Cobden was another) which at this time pushed on educational, sanitary and political improvements all over that important district"^{1.} Morley goes on to show that the Manchester circle were of the opinion that it was among the middle classes of manufacturers that new discoveries in political and moral science found most ready acceptance. But then Morley adds this surprising stricture, "Before he was one-and-twenty years old, Grey was possessed by the conception that haunted him to the very end. When the people complain, their complaint savours of rebellion. Those who make themselves the mouthpieces of popular complaint must be wicked incendiaries. The privileged classes must be ordained by nature to rule over the non-privileged. The few ought to direct and teach, the many to learn. That was Grey's theory of government from first to last. It was derived at this time...from Burke, without the powerful correctives and indispensable supplements that are to be found in Burke's earlier writings."^{2.}

Undoubtedly Grey is a good example of the better type of Nonconformist manufacturer of the time. As far as he was concerned, the authority of the Church extended only to such points of personal discipline as flagrant moral offences, drunkenness or impurity; it had nothing whatever to do with

1. Quoted by R. V. Holt - *Ibid* p. 54-55.
 2. R. V. Holt - *Op Cit.* p. 55-56.

the fixing of a just price, or a living wage, or a reasonable interest or rent. In the century preceding the Industrial Revolution the Church had finally resigned its authority to control and direct the whole life of man. It was now assumed that by the Alchemy of Divine grace, received as a result of the exercise of faith, the individual Christian could be trusted to exhibit good conduct in all human relationships.^{1.} The task of the Church was to inculcate personal virtue, and not to define its expression in the fields of politics or economics, with the result that many Christian men not only acquiesced in, but were even responsible for, conditions in Lancashire factories which were a disgrace to all humane thought. A man like Lord Shaftesbury, in his heroic and self-sacrificing labours, not only failed to get the support he might have expected from the Lancashire Churches, but was even regarded by many Christian men, pillars of the Church as well as mill-owners, as a reckless "troubler in Israel".

The Puritanism which left such a deep impression on the life of Lancashire has been blamed for this divorce of the Church from commercial morality. It is difficult either to prove or to refute this charge, for no one has yet defined a

1. Alfred E. Garvie - The Christian Ideal for Human Society.

adequately the relation of English Puritanism to the rise of modern capitalism. R. H. Tawney, in this connection, writes, "To the Puritan of any period in the century between the accession of Elizabeth and the Civil War, the suggestion that he was the friend of economic and social licence would have seemed as wholly inappropriate as it would have appeared to most of his critics, who taunted him (except in the single matter of usury) with an intolerable meticulousness." ¹ The religious liberty he claimed was liberty of conscience to obey the laws of God, as interpreted and applied in a godly discipline. Calvin's condonation of moderate interest, for example, was accepted with hesitation by Puritanism, but the habitual usurer was regarded as deserving of excommunication, and Ames' "De Conscientia", a practical guide to morals, accepted as a standard authority, is very conservative as regards interest, prices and land enclosures. Baxter's "Christian Directory" is more realistic; it frankly recognises the changed economic situation, but the author refuses to regard the economic order as a mechanism beyond moral control, and insists that the Christian must accept certain moral standards, and must be guided by them no less in the economic than any other sphere. He demands that

1. R. H. Tawney - "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism".p.213

business must be so carried on as not to injure others and as a service to the community. The ethical and economic dualism which characterised Lancashire Nonconformity in Chartist times, and for which Puritanism is sometimes held responsible, finds no sanction in his writings.^{1.}

Nevertheless there was a positive relationship between the capitalistic enterprise of the Lancashire factories and Puritanism. Capitalism did exist towards the end of the Middle Ages, and the spirit of capitalism was not born with the Reformation. And yet involuntarily Puritanism by the virtues it practised, did contribute to the great accumulations of capital which were created and found a continuous outlet in the new industrial age. Troeltsch recognises that "the operation of other mental and spiritual influences is not excluded", but gives his agreement to the general thesis. "When all is said and done, Calvinism remains the real nursing father of the civic and industrial capitalism of the middle classes. Self-devotion to work and gain, which constitutes the everlasting and unconscious ascetism of the modern man, is the child of a conscious "intra-mundane" asceticism of work and calling inspired by religious motives.....In

1. A. E. Garvie - Op. cit. P.110

breaking down the motive of ease and enjoyment, asceticism lays the foundations of the tyranny of work over men. And from the fact that the produce of this work is in no way an end in itself, but advances the general well-being, and that all return which goes beyond an adequate provision for the needs of life is felt to be merely a stimulus to the further employment and increase of it, there results the principle of the illimitability and infinitude of work. On the basis of this economic attitude there arose the early capitalism of.....English Nonconformists.^{1.}

There is one qualification which Troeltsch does not make. The absorption in business which marked the prosperous Nonconformist, was relieved very often by his philanthropy. The case of William Grey has already been noticed, and men of his type could be found in the Chartist period in many Dissenting Churches and Quaker Meeting Houses of Lancashire. Not all savings were returned to capital; large sums were given away to charity. It was towards the end of the eighteenth and in the early years of the nineteenth Century that the great Missionary Societies came into being. But it appears to be proved that Puritanism fostered the development of capitalism on the one hand, and on the other indirectly

1. Troeltsch - Protestantism and Progress (1912) p.135-137.

promoted its release from ecclesiastical control. Neither result was its express intention. Puritanism insisted on individual responsibility ~~more~~ than on social obligation, the account a man must give of himself to his God rather than the claims others have upon him. As the theology was harsh, so often was the practice; as the economic virtues were prized, the absence of these in the poor and unsuccessful was severely judged. Out of this interpretation of the Christian faith there came the Lancashire factory owner of the early nineteenth century, an individualist who was able to divorce his religion from the economic and political spheres of life; who saw no inconsistency in the starvation of his own operatives and the giving of munificent gifts to the Church.^{1.}

This Puritan Capitalism is linked up in Lancashire with the problem of Irish Roman Catholics, a strange example of history turning back upon itself. The development of the cotton industry brought with it the development of Liverpool as a port and commercial centre, and this new port provided the gateway for a continuous stream of Irish immigrants. By creating a pool of cheap labour these Irishmen, mainly Roman Catholics, strengthened the hands of the great cotton manufacturers in their battle with the workers. So poor were the roads of the country that it

1. See The Evolution of Modern Capitalism. J.A.Hobson.

was much easier to reach Lancashire from Ireland than from Somerset or Sussex; since for the very poor the only way of travelling long distances was on foot. The London Poor Law Authorities despatched labourers to Manchester in the cheapest possible way by canal, at a cost per man of 14s, but an Irishman could cross to Liverpool for half a crown. By 1827 so fierce was the competition that, according to Redford, the price came down as low as ^{1.} fourpence.

By 1841, one in every ten people living in Manchester was Irish and the proportion in Liverpool was one in every seven. Over the whole of Lancashire 135,000 Irishmen had settled. But the situation grew even more desperate. The potato famine in the forties precipitated a crisis, and the stream of Irish immigrants became a flood. By 1851 there were 200,000 Irish people settled in Lancashire. According to a report in "The Times" in 1848, the registrar of a Manchester district had declared that "During the last two or three months large numbers of the poor from Ireland have crowded themselves in this district, groves of them rambling about the streets seeking lodging. ...Many of the poor

1. A. Redford - Labour Migration in England 1800-1850 p.81.

creatures have died from cold producing fevers and diseases."

Arthur Redford tells us that at nearby Liverpool, in the same period, thousands of starving Irish people were dying in the streets.²

Not only were these Irish labourers prepared to accept squalid living conditions repugnant to even the poorest Englishmen. There now began to appear those cellar dwellings which remained a blot on the large towns in Lancashire for more than two generations. These immigrants were willing to accept practically any job at all, and many of them took up hand-loom weaving from which the majority of English workmen were turning away. They succeeded in prolonging and making more painful the death of this already doomed industry. The textile employers frankly admitted that cheap labour was brought over from Ireland to keep down wages, and on more than one occasion the cotton spinners of Preston imported such labour for the purpose of breaking a strike.³ It is true that the results in such cases were not always precisely those which the employers had planned. In the "Report on the Irish Poor" a Roman Catholic priest is quoted as saying

1. The Times. February 2nd, 1848.

2. Redford - op. cit. P.136.

3. Redford - op. cit pp 139-140 & Parliamentary Papers 1836.
XXXIV p.37

that the kind of community life they lived, so many sharing one home, tended to throw them together and to encourage them to take part in trade union activity.¹ Some notable leaders of the English Trade Union Movement sprang from these immigrants, the best known being John Doherty, the founder² of the strongest union of the time.

With the influx of Irish Catholics into Lancashire, with its background of Nonconformity, there was certain to be religious friction. Newspaper reports of the period reveal how violent and widespread were the religious quarrels in the industrial towns. There were serious riots at Manchester in 1834 and at Stockport in 1852.

Reference has been made to the fact that many of these Irish labourers took up hand-loom weaving. This is of peculiar importance to Lancashire Chartism, because this class of worker provided the most ardent recruits to the movement. Such workers usually become associated first of all with the Anti-Poor Law Agitation and then graduated from there to the "Physical Force" School of Chartism. Furthermore, it is more than evident from Chartist speeches and propaganda that such weavers were regarded as the martyrs of the economic system and as an indication of the inevitable tendency of the capitalist system.

The economic weakness of the handloom weaver was due to

1. Report on Irish Poor, Appendix p. 62.

2 M. Hovell - Chartist Movement p.22.

a variety of causes. Owing to technical difficulties machinery was applied to weaving much more slowly than to spinning. Then there was a great boom in handloom weaving in the war years 1795-1805, when wages were high owing to the abnormal demand for weavers as compared with that for spinners. The industry was flooded with unskilled labourers who quickly learned sufficient to enable them to earn high wages for the time. A flood of small masters appeared and for a while prospered. The end of the war came as a catastrophe to this part of the cotton trade. Wages which up to 1816 had reached the average of sixteen shillings a week fell as low as six shillings. Just when conditions were at their worst power looms made their appearance and rendered the collapse complete. The figures showing how rapidly machinery displaced the handworker are instructive. In 1820, there were 12,150 power looms, in 1829 - 45,000 and in 1835 - 90,000.¹ The lot of the weavers was not improved by the subterfuges of the small employers, who cut and abated wages without mercy in their efforts to avoid bankruptcy.

By 1835, just before Chartism made its appearance, the hand-loom cotton weavers were mostly employed by large manufacturers, who in many cases had power-loom factories as well. Thus the handloom-weavers fell into two classes - those who competed with power and those who did not. The

¹ Parliamentary Papers 1839, XLIII p.591.

former fared very badly, since they came to be regarded as a kind of reserve of labour to be called upon only when the factory was overworked. That is to say they became casual labourers, living largely on doles paid out of the poor rates, and helping involuntarily to keep down the general level of wages for weaving, in and out of the factory. So harassing and grim are the stories told of the privations suffered by those people that the Commissioner sent to report declared that it would be unwise to print the whole truth, for either it would not be believed, or would give the impression that the evils were beyond remedy.¹ The weavers of Manchester made a return in 1838 of 856 families of 4,563 individuals whose average earnings amounted~~ed~~ to two shillings and a penny per head per week. Of this amount one-half was devoted to food and clothing. In many houses individuals lived upon one penny per day for food and clothing.² The report of the weavers in Ashton-under-Lyme makes even sorrier reading, and does much to explain the fiery eloquence of J.R. Stephens against the new Poor Law.³ The general inference is that wages of one penny an hour for a seventy hours' week were frequent and even general. Not only that, but even these scanty wages were subject to all kinds of deductions a sufficient irritant in the relationship between employer and employee.

¹ See Parliamentary Papers 1840 XXIV. p.7.

² Parliamentary Papers 1839 XLII. p.578 et seq.

³ Idem. p. 584.

Against ruthless employers those poor men had little protection. Even if they succeeded in combining, there were no funds to support a strike; and the least threat of such proceedings brought into use more Irish labour or more powerful looms. To this particular suffering the reformed Parliament was not entirely unsympathetic. A Commission of Inquiry sat twice, in 1834 and 1838-40, but could not devise a remedy, though they did define the nature of the evil. It was unfortunate that the same Parliament should have chosen this period to formulate a new type of Poor Law, and that they should have applied it in such a way as to increase the misery of the weavers. To these people the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 came as a piece of cruel and calculated tyranny and completed the alienation of the poorer type of cotton worker from the established order of things.

Why did so many people persist in an occupation where the rate of wages was so low? That is the question which any dispassionate observer of Lancashire life in the 1830's is compelled to ask. One obvious reason lay in the fact that from 1836 to 1842 there was a major trade depression and it was rank folly to leave one job however badly paid, for the slender chance of entering some other trade. Furthermore the stern discipline of factory life made many people long to avoid the regimentations associated with it. Again, men brought up to the loom were, as a rule, totally unfitted for any other occupation when they

reached middle age. Poverty prevented them from apprenticing their children in better-paid trades, and compelled them to employ their families at the earliest possible age, long before they reached their teens. Thus, with their discontent, with their memories of more prosperous days, ~~and with their memories of more prosperous days,~~ and with their lack of any elementary knowledge of the industrial system of which they were a part, they were an easy target for the revolutionary speakers and pamphlets of Chartism.

There is an unfortunate tendency in painting the social background of Lancashire in this period, to give the impression that the cotton trade (and in particular the weaving section) accounted for all the industrial misery and bitterness in the county. It is well to remember that conditions in the coal mines of Lancashire were worse rather than better. As late as 1842 the Royal Commission on Mines brought out such facts as these from a Lancashire woman: 'I have a belt round my waist and a chain passing between my legs, and I go upon my hands and feet. The water comes up to my clog tops, and I have seen it over my thighs. I have drawn till I have the skin off me. The belt and chain is worse when we are¹ in the family way." It was also shown that children under five worked alone in the darkness. An examination of the Royal Commission's report reveals that the mining industry

¹ G.M. Trevelyan - British History in the Nineteenth Century. p.157.

was being carried on with a complete disregard for human rights and for even the elementary decencies of life.

Pauper apprentices were practically sold into slavery and treated occasionally with the utmost severity. From 1811 an increasing number of adolescent girls and women had been employed in Lancashire mines.¹

The consequences of this employment of workers of both sexes underground, considering the extreme ignorance and semi-barbarism of the colliery population, is better imagined than described. The Commission emphasises the gravity of this moral situation in Lancashire, indeed, the report records a state of demoralisation, not to say barbarism, which defies both description and belief.² The prevalence of so appalling a state of affairs was due in some measure to the general isolation of the mining areas, and to the fact that in almost every case the opening of mines gathered a strangely mixed population into districts hitherto unpopulated. The colliery-masters ran up rough hutments which served as houses, and beyond that little or no care was taken for the people. Churches were very seldom built, and in many mining villages the first religious teaching was given by Chartist preachers.³ Sunday was spent by the great majority of these workers in the beer-houses provided and maintained by the colliery-masters or their managers.

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1. Parliamentary Papers, 1842 XV. pp. 9-18, 27.
 2. Parliamentary Papers, 1842 XV. p. 132.
 3. Parliamentary Papers, 1843 XIII. p. 137.

Even the stern individualism of this age was stunned by the publication of the Report in 1842, and the Government rushed through a law excluding women and children from the mines, without meeting any opposition.

The task of the few who sought to humanise the mining population was not to be envied. In Olaham, however, the reformers achieved a striking success, for here, through the agency of the Sunday Schools, a public opinion was created which regarded mines as fulfilling an essential task in Society.¹ Here such reformers were able to tackle with some success the "truck" system which further debased the standard of life of so many mining districts.

In Lancashire, the agitation against the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 shades quite naturally into the Chartist Movement. Here the agitation against the new Poor Law began in 1836 and was divided into two parts: an organised attempt to prevent the introduction of the law, and a popular movement of protest against the law itself. This latter movement, which, so far as Lancashire was concerned, became the Chartist movement, was of an entirely different character from the agitations which were then beginning in London and Birmingham under the influence of the Working Men's Association and the Political Union. This difference had a decisive effect upon the fate of Chartism.

¹ Parliamentary Papers 1842. XVII. Appendix p.833.

The Anti-Poor Law Movement, on its popular side, was a rebellion in embryo which never came to full development. It was a protest born out of hunger and uncertainty, a gesture of defiance against a tyranny which hurt the poor by making them poorer. It was a mass demonstration of misery and poverty. It had no programme except the redress of grievances. In the main its social theory was to restore the rights which the workers had held before 1834, and to express the Government's obligation to subsidize the poor. The leaders of this agitation used the Bible as the main armoury for the attack, and insisted that the Act was a violation of all Christian principles. This tendency of Lancashire leaders to hark back to the Bible, and in particular to the Sermon on the Mount, as a basis for political and social practice, is the most interesting feature of the whole Chartist Movement.¹ Not for the first time did the New Testament provide the sanction for revolutionary opinions and practices for leaders knowing little of the social, political, or economic theory underlying the society in which they lived. That the Anti-Poor Law Agitation and earlier years of the Chartist Movement had as their leader in Lancashire a former Methodist minister like J.R. Stephens is fully in keeping with the social background of life in the county which has here been sketched.

¹ M. Howell - Op.cit. p. 85.

It is curious to reflect that this appeal to Scripture does much to account for the violence of the Lancashire Chartists. It was because of their reliance on a higher sanction than that of the State, that the popular leaders urged their followers to resist the Act of 1834, even to the extent of armed rebellion. Thus J.R. Stephens, at an Anti-Poor Law Meeting in Carpenter's Hill, Manchester, on February 10th, 1838 (by this time in Lancashire the Anti-Poor Law and Chartist Movements were for practical purposes one), declared, "If Lord John Russell wanted to know what he thought about the new Poor Law, he would tell him plainly that he thought it was the law of devils, and that it ought to be resisted to the death, even if the first man that might be slaughtered in opposing it should be Lord John Russell himself If it was to come, let it come; it should be an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, limb for limb, wife for wife, child for child and blood for blood. (Loud cheers)¹ so help them God and their country (continued cheers)."

His eloquence, activity, and fearlessness, combined with his standing as a Christian Minister, raised the popularity of Stephens to a pitch such as few men have ever attained. Francis Place who was hostile to Stephens and his revolutionary tendencies, declares that "he was obeyed,

¹ G.J. Holyoake - Life of J.R. Stephens. p.122.

almost adored by multitudes Of personal consequences¹
 he was wholly reckless."

Stephens and his lieutenants lashed their followers into a continuous state of holy fury which culminated in threats of insurrection. The best known of these lieutenants were R.J.Richardson of Suffolk, William Benbow of Manchester, Matthew Fletcher (a doctor in Bury), and Peter Murray McDouall, a young medical student of Ramsbottom, destined to play a part in Chartist agitation long after Stephens had been silenced.² These leaders achieved some success in retarding the applications of the new Poor Law, the most conspicuous instance being at Todmorden. With the coming of Chartism proper and the idea of a new rule in society, J.R.Stephens and most of the others vanished from the scene.

It was inevitable that Stephens should vanish then, for he remained in essential things a Methodist minister. Like Wesley, he taught the existence of a God who cared for all the dwellers upon earth, who would not let even a sparrow fall to the ground without his care, and who gave His own Son to preserve His children from the domination of evil. In his teaching Stephens showed a contempt for dogma, and, in language culled largely from the Old Testament, he

¹ Quoted Holyoake op.cit. p.76.

² M. Hovell - The Chartist Movement p.91.

denounced the poor-law and advocated a struggle against it. Stephens conceived himself to be in the direct line of the Old Testament prophets, and thought that the existence of Dr. Malthus fully justified the belief in a personal Devil. But not only did Stephens draw his language from the Old Testament; he drew also his political philosophy. His political ideal was a theocracy of the Old Testament type, in which the preacher announces the will of God, the King enforces it, and the people submit to it. Stephens created the atmosphere in which the emissaries of the London Working Men's Committee could most surely do their work in Lancashire.

Month after month Stephens and Oastler and O'Brien and O'Connor lashed the people of Lancashire into a frenzy of passion against the rulers who had passed the new Poor Law. It is quite impossible to decide what would have been the outcome of this movement had it not been swallowed up in Chartism. Probably it would have died away, burned itself out. It was not a revolutionary movement, for the true revolutionary does not give way to the frantic rhetoric of Stephens. The business of these Poor Law reformers was to protest, which they did with vigour and success. When they found that as a result of their exertions, the New Poor Law was not enforced, and that they could continue to address great public meetings without interference, they were virtually

in the position of a nation which, having mobilised its troops, finds the difference has resolved itself, and yet has to face the fact that once having been recruited, the army is unwilling to be disbanded without fighting somebody. Thus, this unorganised agitation shaded into Chartism, and ⁱⁿdoing so acquired a positive programme. Lancashire radicals now came under the influence of the London Working Men's Association and the Birmingham Political Union. But by retaining their violent methods and their incendiary leaders, Lancashire gave to Chartism the revolutionary fervour by which it is best remembered. Fully developed Chartism derived its programme from London, its organisation from Birmingham, but its personnel and enthusiasm from Lancashire, and, to a lesser extent, Yorkshire.

The Chartist movement, in Lancashire, then, was not based on a systematic political philosophy, but was rather the rallying-point for all those who protested against intolerable industrial oppression. As it progressed, it absorbed a variety of agitations of a special and local character, the aims of which were, in some cases, almost unrelated to the original Six Points of the Charter. In the desperate days of 1841 every Lancashire worker with a real grievance tended to become a Chartist. Chartism was the grand, all-sufficient Cave of Adullam for men who were

too poor to build up their own barriers against economic oppression. At this time O'Connor's paper "The Northern Star" was making all the workers familiar with a hymn of self-glorification, one stanza of which, however, has a startling religious significance.

"O'Connor is our chosen chief
He's champion of the Charter
Our Saviour suffered like a thief 1.
Because he preached the Charter."

Clearly the religious fervour and background which had marked the Anti-Poor Law campaign had been taken over into the new movement. The fact that such sentiments should be written in the "Northern Star", by far the most important of all the Chartist newspapers, is indicative of the part played by religion in rousing the temper of the workers. It also lends some support to Disraeli's theory that the Chartist Movement arose neither out of purely economic causes nor out of political causes, but out of something between the two, to a lack of the lively interest taken by each class in the welfare of others, which Disraeli supposed to be the peculiar merit of pre- 1832 society.² The most obvious organisations to maintain such a relationship was the Church and this break-up of society was symptomatic of the failure of organised religion. The application of the 1834 Poor Law Act was a particular

1 M. Hovell - Op.cit. p.222.

2 Speech in the House of Commons July 12th, 1839.

example of the complete lack of sympathy of the middle-class with the workers, and was undoubtedly the chief cause of the popularity and strength of Chartism in Lancashire. Disraeli expressed the attitude of many discerning men when he declared - "He was not ashamed to say, however much he disapproved of the Charter, he sympathised with the Chartists. They formed a great body of his countrymen; nobody could doubt they laboured under great grievances and it would have been little to the credit of the House to have ignored what would always be regarded as a very remarkable social movement."¹

In a remarkable debate in Manchester in October 1840, James Leach gave seven reasons why the Lancashire Radicals refused to join the Free Trade Movement.

(1) The middle class had betrayed the workers in the case of the 1832 Reform Act, and would doubtless do the same in the case of the Repeal of the Corn Laws.

(2) The evils of which the workers complained were due not to agricultural protection and the consequent depression in trade but to machinery.

(Clearly there was no realisation that the invention of machines could be a symptom and resultant, and not a cause of the expansion of trade.)

1 Speech in the House of Commons, July 12th 1839.

- (3) The League (Anti-Corn Law) promised that as a result of Repeal trade would increase. This was not disputed, but this would be of no benefit to the labourer. Up to then as the cotton trade had increased the wages of the hand-loom weavers had decreased.
- (4) England could only compete successfully with foreign countries, for more trade, by further reducing wages.
- (5) The real object of the wealthy manufacturers who supported the League was the reduction of wages.
- (6) The worker could never improve his lot until the profit-mongers were deprived of political power.
- (7) The real solution of the problems of surplus population and unemployment lay in a return to the land.

These have been set out at length to show how the Free Traders, though their movement had its birth in Manchester failed to gain more than moderate support from the Lancashire operatives.

1 Northern Star Oct.3rd 1840.

Chartism was the creed of hard times and was the expression of a deep-felt but inarticulate sense of economic and social distress. . From 1842 to 1845, Lancashire, like many other parts of the country, was caught in a wave of comparative prosperity, and enthusiasm for the movement in the county rapidly declined. The return of economic progress took away hunger, and took away also the passionate eagerness of the average factory worker for far-reaching reforms. Unemployment after 1843 was less common, wages were slowly but surely increasing, and many of the worst abuses of the factory system were at last being tackled. Emigration to rich and undeveloped lands over the seas began to relieve the pressure in the county's great industrial areas.

One interesting fact regarding the Churches' care of the children can be gleaned from the Report of the Committee on Education in 1838. Quite clearly the number and attendance at Nonconformist Churches was greater than that of the Established Church. These figures are given.

	Nonconformist Scholars.	C of E.	R.C.
1. Manchester	19,032	10,284	3,812.
2 Salford	6,250	2,741	613.
Li Liverpool	8,350	6,318	700
4. Bury	3,056	1,013	---
5. Ashton	7,025	3,100	---
6. Oldham	5,400	1,400	---

According to the Census Report of 1851 the Church of England failed to take up this work, because of clerical suspicion of lay-teaching.¹ Obviously many of the workers, even in the throes of the Chartist campaign sent their children to the Sunday Schools.

In no part of the country did emotional and spiritual fervour make themselves more felt in the Chartist agitation than in Lancashire, and nowhere did prosperity more surely bring about its disappearance.

1. Census Report of 1851 p. - XXVII.

CHAPTER IV.

Chartism as a Political Philosophy.

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During the years of its greatest influence, Chartism filled a real and vital place in the life of the working man. In England during the years 1800 to 1840 the Industrial Revolution acted largely as an instrument of social upheaval and the old pillars of class on which society had rested, with some security, were at last being questioned. The theories and doctrines of the French Revolutionaries, based as they were on the thesis of the "Rights of Men", took a great hold upon the imagination of the working classes, and produced socialist types of movements, whose aims seemed all the more reasonable as the actual course of events demonstrated the evils which flowed from economic inequality.

Down to the middle of the Eighteenth Century, English society was largely feudal in spirit. Social relationships were determined in the main by a feeling of dependence on the part of the workers upon the nobility - and religion carefully sought to teach contentment "with that station of life in which it had pleased God to place you." A hymn expressed it most fittingly.

"The rich man in his castle,
 The poor man at his gate,
 God made them, high or lowly,
 And order'd their estate." 1.

Under the spur of a moving commercial and speculative spirit these relationships broke down. They were unsuited to a period when movement and enterprise replaced feudal security as the basis of economic life.² Acquisition of wealth, which opened up to many the prospects of social advancement, destroyed the old feeling of contented acceptance of that station of life in which they were born. Employers employed no longer men but hands, and with that change, the relationship between the two gradually developed into the payment of cash which was held to cover all the obligations of the one to the other. The poor man's religion had been almost inextricably bound up with the social system of squirearchy, and when the feudal structure crashed, very often his adherence to the Church crashed with it.

It is here we have a clue to all the fanatical enthusiasm exhibited from time to time by the Chartists. Like Fascism and National Socialism in the twentieth century, it can only be understood as a religion which gave expression to certain political concepts. The leaders had huge personal

1 Hymns Ancient and Modern - No. 573.

2 18-

2 M. Hovell - "Chartist Movement" p. 29.

followings and tremendous influence, because, to the workers, their message came with the authority of prophets. Their demonstrations, processions, mass gatherings and petitions were expressions of the passion of a creedless people seeking desperately for some ideals to which they could pin their faith. In a very real sense Chartism was a religion born out of a people's utter bewilderment and fear of the morrow. Like its modern counterparts its disciples sought to implement the creed by way of a political party.

One curious effect of the Industrial Revolution hastened the progress of the Chartist movement. In a world of vast opportunity many poor men succeeded in amassing great fortunes and in holding great powers over their fellows and such men had never been influenced by the ancient semi-feudal traditions or by the surviving guild spirit. When the Chartist Movement had ceased to be of importance, an interesting correspondence took place between Rev. Charles Kingsley and J.A. Nicholls of Manchester. Nicholls had given a lecture to working men on the folly of strikes. Kingsley wrote to congratulate him on his boldness in exposing 'the tyranny of Union strikes', but he went on:

"I cannot, in justice to the working men, forget the temper of the nouveaux riches of Manchester, during the forty years ending, say 1848 - who were

not even free-traders, till they found that 'cheap corn meant cheap wages, and of whom, certainly, the hardest masters and the most profligate men were to be found among these who had risen from the working classes..... Let us honestly call a spade a spade, and recollect this fact, and the other fact that these mill-owners had been, for the last forty years, collecting vast heaps of people from every quarter, (even bringing labourers from Ireland to degrade the civilised labour-wage to the level of what the savage Irishman would take) without the least care as to their housing, education, christianising or anything else, till the manufacturing towns became scabs of unhealthiness, profligacy, ignorance and drunkenness. The mere fact that life in Manchester was shortened seventeen years, in comparison with life in the County, is very awful..... But don't carry away the impression, that I think the young manufacturer's relations to the lower classes are a whit worse than the young squire's. I should be inclined to believe¹ it a great deal better."

It is quite obvious, therefore, that though there were excellent employers like Robert Owen and John Fielden, there were others who seized the power once held by the landowners,

1. Raymond V. Holt - "The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England" p.41-42.

without any sense of corresponding responsibility to their people.

It is essential to draw a very clear distinction between what people in a revolutionary movement believe they stand for, and what they do in fact represent. Few of the Chartists could have comprehended all the social-historical forces which prompted them into action, or have foreseen the effects on national life, if and when the Charter became a reality. If J.R. Stephens, William Lovett, and Ernest Jones brought into being more than they dreamed of, they also found ~~in~~ certain respects that the things they actually achieved in their day turned out not to be all they had wished for. One doubts, if ever they realised that "Hunger and Hatred" were more surely the driving forces than any grasp of great ideals.

"It was a hard generation, with the hardness of men utterly convinced of their own rightness, and of being on the side of economic progress."¹

Conditions were precarious for the employer as well as for the worker, for this was a time of fierce competition. Political economists had discovered and written down laws which appeared to give a logical framework to the new industrial society. These asserted that "free contract"

1 G. D. H. Cole. - "Chartist Portraits" p.3.

was the only rational way of ordering men's economic relationship. Thus, all the workers who laboured in their mills or mines had contracted freely so to labour, - they or their parents or guardians for them - for the hours, and at the wages, which competition caused to prevail. If people suffered, this was no concern of the employer; and any effort to interfere with the free course of production for humanitarian motives would do more harm than good. So caught in the grip of an iron economy which eluded their understanding, the people created an opposing philosophy and set up a political party.

The Chartists never achieved direct representation in Parliament, and, for that reason, few writers acknowledge¹ their right to be regarded as a political party... They were a party, however, since their idea was to set themselves up by constitutional means (this is true of the greater part of the crusade) as a Government. Like practically every revolutionary party, the Chartist movement consisted of a number of groups placing the main emphasis on different aims, but they were united in their desire to win a majority in the House of Commons, and to make the Charter the foundation of the constitutional law of the country. The fact that their attempts to achieve these objects met with such abject failure, does not entitle the historian to ignore their existence. Like all parties, they sought to

¹ It is difficult to regard Feargus O'Connor as truly representing Chartists in Parliament.

raise funds in order to contest elections. They fought quite a number of Parliamentary elections and on many occasions Chartist candidates presented themselves at the meetings and addressed the electors, without going actually to the poll. In 1837, when the movement was at its very beginning, J.R. Stephens fought Ashton-under-Lyne, A.H. Beaumont, Newcastle-on-Tyne; John Bell, Coventry; John Morgan Cobbett (son of William Cobbett) Chichester; and Richard ^OCastler, Huddersfield. At this stage Chartism was not widely known; but by 1841, the date of the next General Election the movement had become organised on a national basis in the National Charter Association. That year a goodly number contested seats, some of them actually working-men, though of course, for votes, they had to rely ¹ on middle-class sympathisers.

Yet judged by this very standard which gave them the right to be called a political party, the Chartists are seen at their weakest. The leaders of the movement, even if given the opportunity, could never have found sufficient agreement to form a government. Thus the Webbs judge the movement - "Made respectable by sincerity, devotion, and even heroism in the rank and file, it was disgraced by the fustian of its orators and the political and economic

¹ G.D.H. Cole - British Working Class Politics 1832-1914.

quackery¹ of its pretentious and incompetent leaders whose jealousies and intrigues finally brought it to nought."

The occasion for such leaders to form a Government never arose; instead, the Chartist party found itself working in a vicious circle. Unless the franchise was widened to include all the workers, Chartist candidates were unlikely to reach Parliament; while the Government then reigning would never contemplate a step which would enable the proletariat to send to Westminster its ~~own~~ leaders. Such influence as the Chartists could exert upon the rulers had to be indirect and in the nature of moral appeals, underlined, now and then, by dramatic spectacles and demonstrations of the workers' numerical strength and solidarity. For a hearing in Parliament they had to rely on some friendly Radical's willingness to be their mouthpiece and this was not always too successful, as they discovered in Attwood's feeble presentation of the first "Mass Petition". Very often such sympathisers were more anxious to ride some particular Radical hobby-horse than to present the Chartist case. The framework of society made it reasonably sure that even advanced Radicals would present only a diluted Chartism in the Commons. Parliament was a class preserve, open only to men of a certain social status, and a close association with Chartism involved a great measure of ostracism

¹ S. & B. Webb - "History of Trade Unionism" (Ed. 1894) p.158.

It is interesting to compare Chartism with the other great agitations of the nineteenth century, agitations in which pressure was exercised from outside Parliament and which were in the main successful. The Reform agitation which culminated in the Franchise Bill of 1832 is an excellent example. For a long time the measure had the sympathy of a large number of members of Parliament, and then in 1831 the clamour of public opinion made it expedient for the Whig Government to push it through the House of Commons. The same clamour enabled it to overcome even greater obstacles of prejudice in the House of Lords. It started with real support in Parliament. The Anti-Corn-Law League proceeded to arouse the people and influence the government by such methods as the Chartist employed, processions, petitions and mass assemblies, but they had a great weight of support behind them in Parliament itself, and a final argument, the increasing sympathy of the Prime Minister. The same basis of comparison holds for all the successful reform movement of the century; in addition to the enthusiasm of the people, they had powerful voices pleading their cause in the Houses of Parliament. Two courses of action were open to the Chartists; either they could seek the support of sympathisers in Parliament (probably among the middle-class Radicals), or they could copy the programme of Continental left-wing parties and seek to revolutionise the whole system of government.

Actually, this revolution was never seriously contemplated by any but the most hot-headed leaders, and even then one suspects that their threats were never intended to have any result other than that of inflaming an emotional and responsive audience. The cost of a failure in revolution was obvious to the most irresponsible and even the turbulent Northern Chartists sought to intimidate the existing Parliament rather than to destroy it.

There seems little doubt that as a political movement it suffered from its insistence upon class consciousness and the preservation of the solidarity of the working classes. The presence of a sprinkling of wealthy and cultured members with the background of another class, might have saved it from foolish errors, and enabled it to meet successfully awkward financial crises, common to most pioneer organisations. Ernest Jones gave a grim justification for this determination to make Chartism a purely working class organisation - "An amalgamation of classes is impossible where an amalgamation of interests is impossible .. All beyond that pale are our enemies These two portions of the community must be separated, distinctly, dividedly and openly from each other. 'Class against Class', - all other mode of proceeding is mere moonshine"¹.

1. Ernest Jones - Notes to the People p.342.

Chartism failed to become a really formidable organisation, mainly because this welding together into a single class was not accompanied by a single programme or a uniform policy. Its only chance of overcoming political and economic weakness lay in unity and that it never achieved. Following a familiar pattern the Chartist movement provides a story of continual schisms and heresy trials and of the dividing up¹ into numerous factions. Even if circumstances had been more propitious, the party at no time had sufficient cohesion to achieve its aims. The political aims held the allegiance of the rank and file only so long as they had behind them the driving forces of hunger and uncertainty. Their loyalty and enthusiasm for the Charter was largely conditioned by economic conditions, and was only indirectly affected by the political life of the time.

So far as policy was concerned, the Chartists made their greatest mistake in opposing the crusade of the Anti-Corn Law League. So fervent did this opposition become that the Repeal of the Corn Laws represented a major defeat to the Chartist movement. Again there was a failure to realise that starvation was the driving force of Chartist agitation

1. R. G. Gammage op.cit. p.198 - Also his comment on Ernest

Jones's novel "De Brassier" - a Democratic Romance - *ibid*
p.361 - 6.

and anything which tended to fill hungry people weakened the force of such agitation. "They allowed themselves to be defeated", says H. M. Hyndman, "by what was a red herring trailed across the path of the democracy; it would have been just as easy to make the activity of the League an essential part of their own campaign".^{1.} As it was, the "Northern Tribune" in 1854 was able to declare that the Anti-Corn Law League had triumphed both against the Government and the working classes.^{2.}

It was the Anti-Corn Law League which caused a serious split in the Chartist Party; for as a result of its activities against the Corn Laws it caused a new Radical party to come into being. Its membership was many-sided, for it attracted to its ranks manufacturers of all types, great masses of the middle class, and a good sprinkling of the working class. The moral force Chartists, repelled by the excesses of the revolutionaries found, through the Anti-Corn Law League, a fruitful alliance with the middle-class. In 1842 even William Lovett found himself willing to accept a working agreement with the left wing of the Anti-Corn Law

1. H.M. Hyndman "The Historical Basis of Socialism in England."

2. Northern Tribune - June 22nd. 1854.

League. The effect of the new combination was seen when the complete suffrage petition was presented to the House of Commons, for Villiers, one of the Free Trade Leaders spoke and Cobden Voted for it.¹ Had not the bitterness of Feargus O'Connor wrecked this alliance, the Complete Suffrage Movement might have linked its goal to the Repeal of the Corn Law and brought universal suffrage generations earlier. Ebenezer Elliott, who had always been a violent opponent of the Corn Laws, transferred his allegiance from O'Connor to Cobden. Elliott is an interesting figure, as the working-class poet of both the Chartist Movement and the League. He was brought up in a Unitarian Sunday School and the result of this early training can be detected in the hymn by which he is mainly remembered to-day, "God save the people." This hymn is now found in several modern hymn-books. When it was written it was regarded as rather dangerous, and when Ebenezer Elliot's son (a clergyman) collected his father's poems for publication he added a note to this hymn, "God save the people," explaining that by the people must be understood the ratepayers, not all human beings.²

1. J.L. & B. Hammond - Op cit. p.271.

2. R.V.Holt. - op cit p.141.

It is true that the alliance had its real difficulties. Chartism was an extension of the 'collective bargaining' theory of the Trade Unions, whereas the Manchester School which sponsored the League was completely individualist. We shall wrong the Manchester school if we fail to recognise the humanitarian element in its propaganda, and it was this element which captured the imagination of Chartists like Lovett and Elliott. To many honest people the League was undoubtedly an attempt to ensure that factory workers had enough to eat, and that the greater part of their wages was not spent in the purchase of bread. Furthermore the League had behind it the great religious impulse of Nonconformity and for that reason many of its large public meetings were reminiscent of the revivalist and emotional atmosphere associated with the tradition of Wesley, and Whitefield.¹ Furthermore the League took not only its atmosphere from the "Wesleyan Revival" but also its method. Methodism had developed an elaborate system by which to excite and at the same time to direct the emotion of the crowd, and intentionally or unintentionally, the League copied the Wesleyan

1. A. Prentice - History of the Anti-Corn Law League

model. The economic doctrine behind the League programme was not in itself likely to evoke an emotional response. Richard Cobden was a Utilitarian, and when he tells us that his sympathies are with the Protestant religion, it is an entirely unemotional preference dictated by political reasons: he regarded Protestantism as more favourable than the Catholic system to the development of industrialism.¹ Others, however, like Bowring, whose visit to Manchester in September 1838 marked the beginning of the League, and John Bright, regarded the campaign as a clear part of their duty as Christians. They drew this conclusion from different premises, for Bowring was a Unitarian, and John Bright was a Quaker. The League gained the instant support of a large number of Nonconformist ministers.

The enthusiasm of the Nonconformist ministers for the League is fairly easy to understand. Many were conscious that the workers had real grievances, but were afraid to be associated with what they felt to be the pagan and revolutionary tendencies of Chartism. On the other hand, for generations they had been in conflict with the Tory Churchmen. The programme of the League provided a suitable via media; and¹ clearly capable of demonstration from Christian doctrine. God had caused the earth to bear sufficient corn

1. Halévy - History of the English People 1830-1841.p.341.

to feed the whole of mankind; what right then has any Government to prevent corn being brought from regions where there was a superabundance, to feed the hungry in a land where the harvest was scanty. This attitude is well exemplified in the policy of the "Nonconformist" which came into being in 1841, under the editorial direction of Edward Miall. Thus in one issue of that year....."At present we have government in excess. Every limb of the nation is pinioned by acts of Parliament - Restriction meets us everywhere regulates our markets, impedes our commerce, cripples our industry, paralyses our religion. These, in our opinion, are the natural fruits produced by mistaking the proper objects of government. The utmost liberty compatible with social order we take to be the inalienable right of all men."

On Aug. 17th 1841 a Conference of Ministers of Religion opened in Manchester to discuss the Corn Laws, and 650 clergymen of different denominations took part. Halévy contends that this number included some Catholic priests, and considering the large number of Irish people who had found employment at less than subsistence wages in Lancashire his conjecture does not admit of much doubt. Only one Anglican clergyman was present, however, and the Wesleyan Methodists refused to take part, in obedience to the rule of their

Church, which forbade Ministers to take part in any political agitation whatever. The dictatorial leader of the Wesleyan Connexion, Jabez Bunting, in his reply to the invitation of the organisers, did go so far as to declare himself publicly in favour of repealing the Corn Laws. The Conference lasted three days and concluded by the delegates carrying unanimously the resolution that "the Corn Laws are a great national offence against the Being by whom kings reign and princes decree justice."¹ Whereas Chartism became a religion which issued in political concepts, Free Trade was an economic theory which rapidly became a religion.

The rising and waning enthusiasm of rank and file Chartists from 1836-1848 is the clearest indication of the essential nature of the movement. Political organisations fall roughly into two classes; one with a systematic and long-term policy, which calls for a certain degree of continuity in the loyalty of its followers and is prepared to spend months, or even years, in propagandist activity to widen the circle of adherents; the other a more ephemeral organisation created to deal with a particular situation, such as a class agitation or an industrial dispute, which springs suddenly into flame and dies just as quickly when it has spent itself. The established parties are of the first class, but it was driven by sheer desperation to adopt

1. Times Aug. 21st. 1841. of the Anti-Corn Law League Sec.
A. Prentice - History Vol. 1. pp 233

the tactics of the second. Thus the leaders always over-estimated the membership of the party, for at peak moments the immense following sprang much more from temporary anger and misery than from conversion to any programme of reform. Engels with justice claims Manchester as the centre of Chartism (also of Trade Unionism and Socialism) because it was the city most affected by the general prosperity or industrial depression in the country.

The achievements of the Chartist Party appear at first sight as pathetically insignificant. But the fight was not in vain, for by its agency the middle and upper classes had their social consciences quickened by a stream of information on the meaning of the new rise of industry to the depressed and under-privileged. In so doing it laid the foundations of a slow but effective revolution. In a great measure it provided the pattern for later democratic movements - though it is easy to exaggerate its effect on such movements - towards the end of the century. Even with a very considerable extension of the franchise in 1867, no labour members appeared in the House of Commons till the nineties, and were even then (with views much more Liberal than Socialist) regarded as awful portents rather than as a powerful political force. It is more important to see the connection

between the Chartists and the powerful Labour Party of the moment; for the members of this Socialist organisation of the Nineteenth century taught much to the promoters of the Labour Movement in this generation.

It was Chartism which taught the upper classes that the proletariat was now prepared to demand a share in the increased prosperity of the country; and that the workers could be excluded from the benefits of an industrial society only at increasing risk of revolution. The attempt so to exclude the working people over the whole of Western Europe did much to influence the theory outlined by Karl Marx in his "Das Kapital." An understanding of the conflict in which Marxism represented one view point does much to clarify the issues at stake in the Chartist Movement. It is no accident that the year of the greatest Chartist disaster 1848, also witnessed the appearance of Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels "Manifesto on Communism." Here Marx declared that the only historical sequence of any importance was that which recorded the unceasing struggle between rival economic classes, and the usual type of history text-book was dismissed as giving a nursery version of the life of man. Capitalism, he showed, had emerged out of the societies of the past and would, in its turn, give place to communism, as soon as

the workers understood capitalism's inherent inability to share with them the products of their own labour.

The factor, however, which makes Marx of interest to us, is that like most of those who write even to-day on the Chartist Movement, he quite neglected the part religion has always played in this struggle and entirely ignored its enormous power to compose the conflicts of classes. Marx was much too astute a thinker to be unaware of the influence of Christianity on the moulding of Western society, and one can only assume that he deliberately ignored the part religion and ethics played in the social conflict. He quite obviously included religion amongst his many "hates", and, at the other end of the scale, tried to discount its influence as much as that other sceptic, Giobon, had done in the previous century.

On the extreme left Marx wrote of a conflict between two classes, the exploiter and the exploited, while, in party allegiance at least, at the opposite pole, Disraeli spoke equally vehemently of the colossal problem presented by two apparently irreconcilable types which made up the population of the country.

"Say what you like, our Queen reigns over the greatest nation that ever existed."

"Which Nation?" asked the young stranger, "for she

reigns over two.....two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different shores or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners and are not governed by the same laws."

"You speak of" said Egremont hesitatingly,

"The Rich and the Poor."

It was in the middle of the road, among the exponents of "laissez-faire", the disciples of Malthus, Bentham and Ricardo, that there was a complete refusal to recognise the wide gulf which divided the nation into two parts and a complete lack of any realisation that it was the function of a Christian organisation to build an enduring bridge uniting the two. The Chartists, finding that in their time few of the Church leaders were willing to raise their voices against social evil, very often contemptuously dismissed religion as the mere handmaid of the governing class - or in Marx's phrase - "the opium of the poor". It is true that by 1837 the Church of England had corrected many of the grosser abuses which had drawn forth Cobbett's fierce invective in his "Legacy to Parsons", but it had done little to meet the urgent moral and spiritual needs of vast collections of people gathered into the new

industrial areas. It had left untouched the burning social problem. It was one thing to put an end to sinecures and plural livings and to add an element of dignity and responsibility to the clergyman's calling; it was another to give hundreds of thousands of people engaged in the monotonous misery of the factory, a meaning in life. How far could a Church, which was the handmaid of wealth succeed in helping men and women to turn away from a grim struggle, in which wealth brought fame and poverty contempt, to this mysterious atmosphere, where the soul of Dives was¹ no more esteemed than the soul of Lazarus? The importance of the Church lay in its power to create a world of its own, with standards, duties and satisfactions other than those set and sought in the race for wealth.

It is clear that Methodism, having lost its early missionary enthusiasm had fallen into the spirit of the Church and had become an upholder of the 'status quo' - a defender of respectable society. In his account of Methodist societies in one town, Benjamin Smith writes how in early days the ~~W~~earers used to attend Chapel with their aprons rolled round their waists, and some of them thought that their attendance at services in working garb² was a mark of holiness. By the Chartist era, this refreshing Christian outlook had vanished. Indeed the

1 O.L. & B. Hammond - Op. cit. p. 224.

2 B. Smith - Methodism in Macclesfield p.212.

Annual Report of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference in 1842 draws attention to the fact that in times of distress the poor absent themselves from services, "because a want of suitable clothing leaves a meanness in their appearance which is chiefly conspicuous by its being contrasted with that of the more favoured of the brethren." Another commentator records "The general practice is, on the Sunday evening for those who are not able to make a decent appearance at a place of worship, to congregate together, pay their halfpenny or penny, and send for a newspaper from a public house.¹ So completely had religion become identified with respectability and success that workers could not but believe that to attend in shabby garments would bring on them the contempt of the regular worshippers. Furthermore both in Anglican and Nonconformist Churches, the system of social distinction was preserved in the practice of pew-rents.²

Yet it would be unfair to Nonconformity to assume that it did not in some ways reflect a more democratic spirit than did the State Church. Ministers had often sprung from humble parents, and, in the Methodist Church particularly the gifted workman would be welcomed as a local preacher, and this type of artisan could, even then, reach an official

1 First Report (1844) Health of Town Commission p.51.

2 J.T.Slagg "Manchester Fifty Years ago". (1881) p.141.

position in the Nonconformist Church. But none the less Nonconformist Churches were places where comfortable and new clothing was a sacred propriety, where the difference between the skilled workman who had ambition of rising into the middle-class and the workman who through unemployment had become a pauper, was as sharp as anywhere else. Halévy has summed up most accurately the social significance of the Nonconformity which faced the Chartists - "Puritan Nonconformity tended to become a transitional creed, a stage in the history of an English family. The unskilled labourer becomes in turn a skilled workman, an artisan, the head of a small business.... and as he rises out of the barbarism in which the working class was plunged, he becomes a Nonconformist. If he rises still higher on the social ladder, if his children rise after his death, he or they go over to the Church of England." ¹ Thus in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Nonconformist Churches gave a social standing, rather than stood for spiritual and ethical standards. Success and failure in the struggle of life received the same judgment and treatment inside the church, as in the world outside.

Disraeli, even if not an orthodox Christian, was at

1. Halévy - England in 1815, p.371.

least understand one simple fact and that was that the deep bog into which the English poor were forever being driven, could be drained only by men and women impelled by Christian impulses. He realised as clearly as anyone that millions of respectable Church members saw no connection between their faith and their duty to society, but he was equally aware that the most effective blows against the prevailing system were being dealt by Christians, fighting for the sake of Christ. Marx believed that the "Ten Hours Bill" finally gained a majority in the House of Commons because of bitter discussions among the bourgeoisie. The benefits accruing to the worker were purely accidental. Disraeli knew better. He knew, declares Christopher Hollis, the Catholic historian, that the Ten Hours Bill was secured by a handful of Christians who thought it wicked that their fellow-men should be treated as animals.¹

The first effective attack on the factory system came from Thomas Michael Sadler, and his motive in attacking it was purely religious. His work was taken up by Lord Ashley-Cooper (later Lord Shaftesbury) whose motive was also entirely Christian. One was a Methodist, the other a narrow Evangelical of the Anglican Church - neither of them men of outstanding intellect. They were not always able fully to answer the questions of the classical

¹ Christopher Hollis "The Two Nations" pp.137-8.

economists as to how society would survive if the standard of life of the poor was raised above the level of starvation; it was their great achievement that this inability did not cause them to hesitate for an instant. Long before Industrial Psychology had made its appearance these two pioneers realised that there was supreme economic value in a contented worker.

There were many Christians who fought the Chartist battle for a more equitable distribution of the resources of the nation, without joining the Movement; indeed, they would have scorned to be associated with the agitation. Perhaps it can be said that the Chartist Churches, which were established in the early forties, represented the real spirit of the Movement, which lived on when Chartism as a political party had faded from the English scene.

CHAPTER V.

THE PEOPLE AND THE CHURCHES

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The religious condition of any age is difficult to gauge, and, in the case of a period of rapid change such as the first half^{of} the nineteenth century the task becomes almost impossible. Here, as throughout Europe, the French Revolution had frightened the upper classes into orthodoxy and the observance of the conventions of the Established Church. Atheism and agnosticism were now felt to be forms of treason, and reference to them in polite society against the canons of good taste. The new burst of religious activity, with the Church becoming a bulwark against revolutionary movements, showed itself in the founding of missionary societies for work at home and abroad. In 1784, Thomas Coke set before the Methodist Conference a plan for the "Establishment of Missions among the Heathen", and laboured unceasingly until the "Wesleyan Missionary Society" was fully organised in 1813. In 1789, came William Carey's great missionary appeal to the Baptists, and five years later the "London Missionary Society" was founded. These were followed in quick succession by the "Church Missionary Society" and the "Religious Tract Society" in 1799, and the Bible Society in 1803. During this period, older societies like the "Society for the Propagation of the

Gospel" and the "Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge" vastly increased their activity. But the evangelisation of the masses in the new industrial areas of Lancashire or even the maintenance of ordinary civilised standards of life were never seriously tackled. In later years it was customary to lament that the Church of England had lost its hold on the working classes, but as far as the new proletariat, the miners, the railway and factory workers was concerned, it never had much hold to lose.

The situation from 1800 to 1850 was admirably summed up by Horace Mann in his report to the Registrar General in 1851. "The middle classes have augmented rather than diminished that devotional sentiment\$ and strictness of attention to religious services by which, for several centuries they have been so eminently distinguished. With the upper classes, too, the subject of religion has obtained, of late, a marked degree of notice, and a regular Church attendance is now ranked as amongst the recognised proprieties of life. It is to satisfy the wants of these two classes that the number of religious structures has of late years so increased. But while the labouring myriads of our country have been multiplying with our multiplied material prosperity, it cannot, it is found, be stated that a corresponding increase has occurred in the attendance of this class in our religious edifices.

More especially in cities and large towns it is observable how absolutely insignificant a portion of the congregation is composed of artisans.¹ There is no reason to suppose that this summary is not a fair description of the religious life of the time.

As soon as the Chartist Movement was launched, the question of the reaction of the Church to such a crusade became of great importance. In any social movement involving masses of the people that problem inevitably presents itself. It was true that few of the Chartists were active members of the National Church, but many were associated with the Methodist denomination and probably many more would have claimed the title of Christian without making a claim to membership in any particular sect. The question demanded an answer. One thing all students of the time recognise is that when Chartism dawned the Churches were not ready for its challenge.

Between the Established Church and the ordinary man there lay a deep and widening gulf. By the 1830's the vast increase in the population of Lancashire had overwhelmed the old Parish system and the organisation of the Church no longer had any real relation to the needs of the people. Parliament had done something for the spiritual needs of the toilers; as a sign of national gratitude for

1. Census of 1851, Religious Worship in England and Wales - Official report by Horace Mann. p. CLVIII - Quoted by J.L. & B. Hammond. Op.cit. p.217.

"king-making Waterloo", it had voted a million pounds for the erection of churches in populous areas and these Churches remain as symbols of the piety and deplorable taste of the generation that destroyed Napoleon. But this was a straw in the wind, and an uneasy and grudging recognition of the fact that the Industrial Revolution was accompanied by a rise in population, one which in the 1830's and 1840's showed no sign of having reached its peak. In 1751 the population was roughly 6,500,000, in 1841, about 15,000,000¹ and the upward trend continued. The "State Church" had neither the clergy nor the buildings to cope with this dramatic change in numbers and in the distribution of population. If there had been any general desire for public worship in the newer industrial towns, an impossible situation would have been created. It is true that the public conscience had at last compelled Parliament to concern itself with the laxity of Anglican priests, and a Parliamentary and Ecclesiastical Commission had been set up to deal with the evils of Pluralism, but the task had only just begun and the opposition to such interference in the internal working of the Church was still formidable.

As a result of the labours of this Commission an

¹ For detailed account see "An Economic History of Modern Britain" - J.H. Clapham. Vol. 1. p.53 et seq.

Established Church Bill was passed in 1836. The populous areas of Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire were henceforth, to have Bishops of their own. Bishops were to be paid a fixed income instead of the varied and fluctuating sums which they had hitherto received, but since their aggregate incomes were still to amount to £200,000 per annum (cf. the £40,000 of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in France) it could be hardly be said that there was any mean attempt to reduce the episcopal order to apostolic poverty. Some checks were also applied to the evils of pluralism. But more important than any of these changes was the setting up of a committee to use the surplus wealth of the hierarchy to improve poor livings and to endow new parishes in populous areas.

These changes, however, indicate little grasp of the real problem, the complete irrelevance of the Church to the life of the working-man. It is true that the seating accommodation of the Churches bore no relation to the population, but it was much more than adequate for the average number of communicants. In Leeds, the Parish Church serving 15,000 people could boast of only fifty communicants. Friedrich Engels felt that no visitor from overseas could fail to be struck by what he called "the religious bigotry and stupidity of the English

respectable middle classes."¹ Even more important is the evidence of Mozley, a High Churchman, who, writing in 1844 declared ... "the whole of our manufacturing people, the whole of the poorer classes in our towns are alienated from the Church... An enormous proportion, three-quarters or nine-tenths are neither Church people nor of any other religion."²

It is of real importance for us to ask by what means this gulf between Church and people had come into being. One obvious cause was that the Church itself had increasingly departed from the conception held by the medieval Church of its place in the community. In medieval times, though the Church had taught that life was a school training men and women for a richer and juster life in heaven, it had also affirmed that governmental laws and institutions should have a clear and integral connection with the Gospel of Christ. It was the "charity" of the Church which helped to make the Feudal system acceptable to the people at large. It was doubtless for this reason that some Chartists such as J.R. Stephens set out to recapture a golden age from the past, rather than to shape a society in conformity with the immense revolutions in the economic

² British Critic. Vol. 28. p. 337.

1. Friedrich Engels - Socialism p. XIV.

structure of the nation. In the mediæval State though practice and theory were not always harmoniously wedded, the Church had seen fit to fix a "Just level of wages", to define honest standards of craftsmanship and to forbid usury and divorce. When that concern for the people died away, the tremendous influence of the Church went with it. By the early nineteenth century the belief had gained currency, not merely that the Church was indifferent to social justice, but that it was opposed to simple fundamental changes which would make life more endurable for the masses.

The records of the period make it quite impossible to acquit a great majority of the clergy of the Church of England of neglect for the moral and physical betterment of the poorer classes. Indeed, they do more than that, they prove quite conclusively that the Anglican priests repeatedly formed themselves into a formidable barrier to reform after reform. Of course there was no lack of self-sacrifice on the part of individuals, but the general standard was very low indeed. The picture which George Eliot paints in her novel *Felix Holt* of the local rector, something of a hunter and sportsman, a hard drinker and a hail-fellow-well-met type of parson is only too true to life. Jane Austen's novels paint the life of the time in less sombre colours, but quite obviously she accepted

the fact that the Church was the national dumping-ground¹ for the younger-unendowed sons of the nobility. She was a clergyman's daughter herself and is unlikely to have overstated the case concerning the low standards of education common to most of the clergy. Their background of family life and birth, their national interests and their spirit of class-consciousness quite unfitted them for the task of relating the Christian teaching to the life of the down-trodden and unprivileged.

Anyone who studies the newspapers and magazines read by the working men of the Chartist era must be impressed by the space and energy given to the attacks on the Church. Occasionally such attacks were directed against the doctrines of the Church, but more often than not they dealt with the inhumanity of the clergy. There was a feeling abroad that the Church gave its sanction to all the injustices and abuses that degraded the poor and outraged their self respect. An example is provided in the agitation against flogging in the army. This was a barbarity that stirred the working-class sentiment deeply, for it was a symbol of the humiliation of their class, and the clergy took no part in helping to remove it. The "Poor Man's Guardian" commenting on this agitation declared ... what priest.... was even known to denounce the atrocity from the pulpit

¹ G.E.Mitton - "Jane Austen and her Times" Chap.III.

or to invoke the Legislature against the bloody- and soul-degrading practice ? Oh, no, the vile wretches would cant about beer-shops and tea-gardens and Sabbath-breaking, or anything else that afforded innocent pleasures to the poor, but not a word would they say on behalf of the poor tortured soldier for fear of giving offence to the 'order' from which the officers are taken."¹

In their work on "The Age of the Chartists", the Hammonds² relate the story of a Hampshire clergyman who gave evidence before a Parliamentary Committee in 1833, as to how he had succeeded in amassing sufficient evidence within a period of a year to send a few village labourers to the gallows for burning hayricks. Such incidents explain why the working classes tended to evince such bitter hatred towards the State Church. There were individual priests of wide sympathies and humane feeling, but their witness was lost in the impression created by their class-conscious colleagues. Cobbett had no sectarian dislike of the Church, indeed his deepest hatred was reserved for the Methodists, these "ruffian sectaries"³. His violent rage against the Anglican Church was prompted by a feeling that was common throughout the whole working-class world - the feeling

1 The Poor Man's Guardian, September 7th, 1833.

2 J.L. & B. Hammond - The Age of the Chartists p.217.

3 Political Register - Jan 3rd. 1824.

that there was something false to the spirit of Christianity in the conduct of men who read the New Testament in Church on Sundays and turned so ruthless a face on week-days to miserable men whose lives a savage law had brought within its grasp.

In spite of the Reforms embodied in the Parliamentary Bill of 1836, the condition of the Church in Manchester even in 1850 shows how ill-placed Anglicans were for making religion a vital force in the life of the poor. In the fifteenth century a rector of Manchester proposed to the parishioners to rebuild the parish Church and make it collegiate, appropriating the tithes and other endowments to the maintenance of the new college. This arrangement was carried out; the Church which is now the Cathedral was rebuilt, and a College was formed, consisting of a Warden, Fellows, Chaplains and others. This College degenerated into a nest of sinecures. In 1830 the Warden, four Fellows, two Chaplains, a Clerk in Orders, and a lay Clerk drew an income of over £5,000 from the property of the College, but repudiated all care of souls in the parish, and all duties outside the Collegiate Church. The people of Manchester had thus to make their own provision; about fifty-three Churches were built and some endowments provided. When Prince Lee was appointed the first Bishop of Manchester in 1847, he found a city of nearly half a million people

with practically no pastoral oversight, though the Chapter over which he presided lived handsomely^d on the revenues of the Parish. This scandal ended in 1850, when the people of Manchester, led by the Bishop, obtained an Act of Parliament, at a cost of £4,000 creating a number of parishes each of which was to be a rectory, with cure of souls, and making a just distribution of the revenues of the Chapter: The Act was contested, and the report of the proceedings in Committee threw a valuable light on the state of Manchester. The counsel for the Bill stated that there were nearly 400,000 people in Manchester, that there were 60,000^o sittings in the Churches, 40,000 of which were let out for pew-rents. The endowments of the Churches were in some cases, no more than £30 a year, and there were very few in which a house was provided, hence most of the Churches were absolutely dependent¹ on pew rents.

No survey, however brief, of the religious condition of Lancashire at the dawn of the Victorian era can leave out of account the important part played in the spiritual life of the people by the Nonconformist Churches. In many ways the first half of the nineteenth century was the time of their greatest strength. A century before they had seemed condemned to extinction in the gentlemanly

¹ Manchester Rectory Division Bill - Committee of the House of Commons, Session 1850. Cited by J.L. & B. Hammon op.cit. p.230-1.

atmosphere of the eighteenth century. In these days the Church of England was broad enough and tolerant enough to embrace any variety of religious opinion which could on the most favourable construction be considered Christian, provided always that the holder did not acknowledge allegiance to the Pope. The Methodist revival, however, gave a new life to the old Dissent.

In course of time, the Methodist Movement established itself as a sect and there was inevitably a change in its spirit and atmosphere. Though in North Wales and Cornwall it retained the characteristics of a Revivalist movement, by the early years of the nineteenth century it had become a settled religion in the great industrial districts.¹ In the towns of Lancashire it no longer carried the zest and freshness of a new and ~~a~~ passionate gospel. In the days of the Chartists there were more Methodist members in the southern districts of Cornwall than in Manchester, Salford and Stockport, though these towns contained a larger population than the whole of Cornwall. In Lancashire the Methodist Societies did not increase as fast as the population. Between 1830 and 1850 the population of Lancashire increased by fifty per cent. The places embraced in the Manchester District in the Reports of the Methodist Conference increased

4 Journal of the Royal Statistical Society 1840 p.152.

faster than the average, for they included such rapidly growing towns as Manchester, Stockport, Rochdale, Oldham and Blackburn. The Methodist members for these circuits increased by about twenty per cent. In Manchester the figure rose from 6070 to 6767; in Stockport from 1355 to 1653; in Rochdale and Blackburn the figures show a decline. Musgrave, writing specifically of Bolton, gives the number of members in 1800 as 1234, and in 1850 as 2196; the population of Bolton had increased in the half-century, from 18,000 to 60,000.¹ This impression of Manchester and district is confirmed by a contributor to a contemporary magazine - "Visit the Churches and Chapels of this great town; look around the various congregations, richly and gaily dressed, comfortably seated in easy-cushioned pews, and say how many of the real horny-handed workmen will be found among the group, although the proportion of that class to the rest of our population is so great."² Leon Faucher, in his book on Manchester, declared that you did not see the working classes in the chapels of the city. "The people walking to service along the streets in silence and with a reserved and formal attitude" belonged exclusively to the middle classes; the operatives loitered at their doors or

¹ Musgrave - Origin of Methodism in Bolton.

² Article in the "Characteristics of Manchester, North of England Magazine, 1842, Vol. I. 169.

lounge at street corners until the hour of service was over and the public house opened its doors. He goes on to say that, since they did not evince any desire to go to Church they were prevented from going anywhere else. "If the people of Manchester want to go out on a Sunday, where must they go? There are no public promenades, no avenues, no public gardens and no public common -- everything in the suburbs is closed against them; everything is private property; in the midst of the beautiful scenery of England the operatives are like the Israelites of old, with the promised land before them but ¹ forbidden to enter into it." This account is endorsed by the editor of the 'British Critic', who declared that such conditions prevailed in all large towns. "It may be truly said that the whole of our manufacturing population, the whole of the poorer classes, are alienated from the Church. Yet this does not by any means express the sum of their misery. An enormous population; three-fourths or nine-tenths ² are neither Church people nor of any other religion."

Though Methodism has been called a revival of Puritanism it did in fact appeal far more to the emotional side of human nature than the earlier movement, and its beginnings were marked by a crude theology which demanded little logical thought. Lecky, and indeed other historians,

¹ Faucher - "Manchester in 1844" p.56.

² British Critic 1840. Vol. 28, p.345.

claim that the Methodist revival, by turning the thoughts of the working class from earth to heaven, saved England from a revolution like that experienced by France. A modern historian, Professor Harold Laski, firmly reiterates this opinion - "nor was it an accident that no influence was more persuasive than that of Wesley..... in inducing the masses in England to accept the grim discipline of the new factories in return for the dubious consolation of an unproved and unprovable bliss.¹ Given opportunity to explain this, Professor Laski declared "as is well known by all historians..... at the time of the Industrial Revolution Wesleyanism deflected the sense of man's indignation with the conditions in the new factories to religion as a consolation for the sorrows of their life."² It is quite evident that, for good or evil, this type of evangelical appeal made for respect for law and order, and in time it became a characteristic note in the life of many bodies outside the Methodist Connexion. In the Church of England, a group of Evangelicals gained prestige by their success in the Anti-Slavery agitation, and by 1837 had gained a firm foothold in the National Church.

It may be pointed out that there is an apparent contradiction between this description of Methodism as a bulwark

¹ Harold Laski - "Threat to the Constitution".

² News-Chronicle account of the Laski Libel Action
Nov. 28th, 1946.

against revolution and the small percentage of workers who in Chartist times attended any type of Church. The explanation lies in the fact that by the 1830's Methodism had lost its first missionary character, the revival force had spent itself out it had left a permanent influence behind. Lecky and his school, however, are only partially correct. It is just as true to say that Methodism succeeded because the English were peaceful, as that the English were peaceful because of Methodism. In his novel "James Woodford", Henry Solly, a Unitarian and a Chartist supporter makes his working-class hero say:-

"None of us had any great love for the cloth. Not that we had any bad feelings towards them, but I believe we most thought the Church Establishment was a matter of money and that all clergymen did and said their doings and sayings merely to get paid. So that we had a feeling of contempt for them because we thought them so uncommonly like hypocrites. The same with regard to religion generally. There was very little real enmity against it, so far as I could see among working-men. We only thought it humbug and not worth a sensible man's troubling his head about."¹

Tradition of all types tends to survive longer in a village, and so in rural communities it was true that the Methodist Chapel tended to become the spiritual and social

¹ Henry Solly - James Woodford, p.214.

centre for the labourer. It is probably of this that Professor G.M.Trevelyan is thinking when he records that "In the lower ranks of society, horror of French Republican atheism helped the Wesleyan movement to spread more widely than ever after the death of its great founder in 1791."¹ It is more than doubtful if such a statement could be substantiated as a fair generalisation of any of the industrial areas, and statistics of Methodism already quoted show it to be quite inaccurate as a picture of the Manchester area. J.L.& B.Hammonds' deduction is probably much nearer the truth in the case of Lancashire: "the teaching of Methodism was unfavourable to working-class movements."² The Hammonds go on to declare that whereas Methodism taught resignation to evil conditions, the Trade Unions were more practical in that they organised opposition. Methodism stressed spiritual individualism; the Trade Unions made class loyalty a virtue. Even the Methodist's neighbourly love was only a method of getting one's neighbour converted. Some point is given to this criticism by the recent book of Dr. W.E. Sangster, the distinguished Methodist minister, who argues that "in the early industrial age Methodism was concerned with social salvage rather than with any consideration of these deep economic ailments from which sprang the misery of the gin house and the women of the streets."³

¹ G.M.Trevelyan - English Social History P.494.

² J.L.& B.Hammonds - The Town Labourer. 1760-1832.see pp.277-87

³ W.E.Sangster - "The Path to Perfection" p.172.

The attitude to the civil government that was proper for Methodists was defined in the "Minutes of Several Conversations with the Rev. J. Wesley and the Preachers in connexion with him", published in 1779. "None of us shall either in writing or conversation speak lightly or irreverently of the Government under which we live. The oracles of God command us to be subject to the higher forces, and - 'Honour the King' is thus connected with the 'Fear of God'." In the early revivalist days under the surge of a great spiritual power, preachers and converts found little difficulty in obeying this injunction. - But when the Methodist Church became a great organisation in the midst of a population like that of Manchester, Rochdale, or Bolton, in a world where the justice or injustice, of institutions was fiercely debated, the situation was more complicated. The Methodist rule against speaking lightly or irreverently of the Government came to be interpreted as implying not merely a negative but a positive duty. The Annual Reports of Conference indicate the attitude towards popular movements of official Wesleyian Methodism. In the Report of 1833, Trade Unions are referred to in this language "In these times of conflict among certain classes of the community, keep at the utmost distance from all associations which are subversive of the principles of true and proper liberty, employing unlawful oaths, and threats and force to acquire new members, and to accomplish

purposes which would tend to destroy the very framework of society." The Report for 1849 condemns the Chartist agitation of the previous year in the strongest language, and rejoices in the aloofness of Methodism, from such struggles. - "During the agitation of the year, and while disloyal and disaffected men have been endeavouring to allure the humbler classes of our fellow-countrymen in their schemes, and have sought to excite them against their rulers, it has given us unspeakable pleasure to behold your spirit and conduct."

On the older Nonconformist Churches the influence of the Methodist Revival was tremendous. Under its warm fervour the old-fashioned radical and somewhat rationalistic Dissenter disappeared or joined the new-born Unitarian sect. Here it is a point of passing interest that nowhere did the Unitarians gain so firm a foothold as in Lancashire, where very often quite small villages still maintain reasonably strong Unitarian communities. In 1851 there were thirty-five Unitarian places of worship in Lancashire with seating accommodation for 12,000 people.¹ The strength of the Independents, however, still lay among the middle class, and in her novel 'Felix Holt' George Eliot has a pertinent reminder of this fact. She paints a picture of a

¹ R.V.Holt - Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England, p.41.

Congregational minister and of the company of prosperous tradespeople and farmers who formed the bulk of his normal congregation, and gives this picture of the failure of this Church to attract the working-class. "On a Wednesday however, Mr. Lyon and one of his deacons conducted a service in the neighbouring mining village of Sproxton attended by old men, a journeyman tailor and a consumptive youth --- not a collier had been won from the strong ale of the 'Sugar Loaf', not even a navvy from the mild drink of the 'Blue Cow'."

Obviously the Puritan Churches made little appeal to the population of the squalid manufacturing and mining districts.¹

Among the middle-class supporters of the Nonconformist Churches the effects of the Evangelical Revival were profound. Dr. R.W.Dale of Birmingham gives a vivid picture of the results of the Evangelical Revival as they appeared during the early nineteenth century. He declares "Meeting houses which had been deserted were crowded. Meeting-houses which had been large enough for their congregations for two or three generations had to be made larger. New meeting-houses in great numbers were erected. Cottages were rented in villages; farmhouse kitchens were lent, old barns were turned into chapels; and young men who had been hard at work all through the week went out in companies from the towns on Sunday mornings to conduct the services."²

¹ George Eliot - Felix Holt p.118 (Blackwood's Edition)

² Cited in Centenary of the Lancashire Congregational Union, 1806-1906 B.Nightingale pp.7-8.

These Evangelical Churches shared the confidence of the Methodists that the very glory of God had broken upon the darkness of many centuries, and that the day was not remote when all nations would rejoice in the blessedness of the Christian redemption. Such a movement obviously tended to break down denominational barriers, for it emphasised the vital importance of the evangelical creed and it regarded almost with indifference all forms of Church policy that were antagonistic to that creed. But it cannot be too strongly emphasised that the Evangelical Revival was primarily a middle-class movement, and that the proletariat, if attracted for a brief time, was not, in the main, held and moulded by it.

For Lancashire with her large number of immigrants from Ireland, the position of the Roman Catholic Church was of some importance at this time. The isolation of England from the Continent during the Napoleonic Wars is seen in nothing so clearly as in the blindness of most Englishmen to the Catholic revival which was going on abroad. England under Tory leadership had taken her stand with the anti-revolutionary forces in Europe, and thus had been brought into alliance with the Catholic Church and the Pope, whom many good Protestants still professed to regard as Antichrist. But in spite of such fortuitous alliances the

~~Cited in Centenary of the Lancashire Congregational Union, 1806-1906. B. Nightingale. pp. 7-8~~

more thorough-going Tories managed to hold up the emancipation of Roman Catholics until 1829. By the time of the Chartist movement the Catholic Church was regaining strength in the country. The French Revolution had brought to England large numbers of monks and nuns from the Continent, including several English communities from Belgium which, linked with the indigenous Catholics and the Irish Immigrants, made Roman Catholicism a useful ally of Nonconformity in the fight for emancipation. Not only that; after Waterloo there was a perfect craze for foreign travel among the upper classes (a renewal of the "Grand Tour" of the XVIIIth Century). The unique fascination of the Eternal City attracted many visitors and there were a few important conversions to the Roman Church.

The Repeal of the Test Act in 1828 (it had in fact been virtually a dead letter for decades, but it was there and could have been enforced at will), the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, and the Reform Act of 1832, carried with them a recognition that the Church of England was no longer coterminous with the nation. John Morley adequately summarises the situation - "It (the Church) was not identical with the parliament which spoke for the nation; it had no longer a title to compose the governing order; and - a more startling disclosure still to the

x minds of Churchmen - laws affecting the Church would henceforth be made by men of all churches and creeds, or even men of none. This hateful circumstance it was that inevitably began in multitudes of devout and earnest minds, to produce a revolution in their conceptions of a church, and a resurrection in curiously altered forms of that old ideal of Milton's austere and lofty school - the ideal of a purely spiritual association that should leave each man's soul and conscience free from 'secular claims and hireling wolves.'¹

In these words Morley has defined clearly the gap between the Church and the nation. In the same chapter he draws attention to one other important factor in the movement for reform; "Evangelical religion divides with rationalism the glory of more than one humanitarian struggle."² The years after the French Revolution witnessed a growth in agnosticism, and atheism, or as they were all referred to by the respectable middle class, infidelity. Before the Jacobin excesses of the French Revolution, deism and atheism had found a lodgment with the upper classes; now these returned to the traditional faith, and infidelity was taken up by the working-man. In the eighteenth century it had been a plaything of the aristocracy, now

¹ John Morley - "Life of Gladstone" Vol. 1. p.113-114.

² John Morley - Ibid. p.115.

it was clearly allied to the political aims of many of the Chartists. According to Engels the great number of such free-thinkers were to be found among the Owenite Socialists,¹ while Disraeli describes a clergyman charged with the spiritual oversight of a parish with 100,000 heathen.² It was doubtless this increasing atheism which called forth the work of Christian Socialists like Maurice and Kingsley.

Evidence of the concern of the authorities over the increase in rationalism is provided by the blasphemy trials, of the early 1840's. Such trials have been rare features of English history. There seems to be little doubt that the prosecutions of 1840-43 were primarily initiated by the Bishop of Exeter's zeal for the extermination of Robert Owen and Owenism. One interesting by-product of this zeal was the enforcement of the law which prohibited the giving of lectures on Sunday for which an admission fee was charged, except in the case of religious societies. Many secular speakers overcame this by registering the societies as "Protestants of the variety known as Rational Religionists." Abel Heywood, John Cleave, and Henry Hetherington, leaders of the movement for the unstamped press, were all persecuted for the publication of the free-thinking work, Haslam's "Letters to the Clergy". But in fact the prosecutions

¹ Engels - Socialism p. XIV.

² Benjamin Disraeli - Sybil p.125.

failed, and all these escaped with only nominal punishment. Political rather than religious motives were behind the prosecutions, as was the case in the trials of Charles Southwell, G.J.Holyoake and Thomas Patterson for editing the 'Oracles of Reason' in 1842.

The attack by the authorities was probably acutated more by fear of the rationalistic link with Owenite Socialism, than by any great ideal of defending the Church; for Chartist leaders like Cooper, Hetherington, and Holyoake speedily became known for their scepticism and their support of the agnostic press. It was easier for the working-man to get hold of such organs as the "Free-Thinker", "The Oracle%", "The Reasoner" and "The Movement" than to obtain any newspaper setting forth the Christian point of view. These papers normally painted Socialism as an effective substitute for Christianity and declared Chartism to be the finest expression of the new faith. It was not surprising that George Eliot's translation of Strauss's "Leben Jesu" in 1846 found such a ready market.

It is a significant pointer to the religious trends of the Lancashire operatives that the "Northern Star", a paper which had a working-class circulation, should constantly contain advertisements of the theological, political and miscellaneous works of the deist Paine. Meantime, new writers arose to carry further the attacks

of Paine, gleaning much of their material from the works of the more scholarly French deists. In 1818, a rationalistic¹ "Life of Jesus" was published and ran into many editions. In fact, the growth of the infidel² press in England at this time is one of the surest evidences of the spiritual bankruptcy of the Christian Churches among the people who needed them most. To the middle and upper classes, the pattern seemed only too familiar, for just such a wave of rationalism had swept France before the revolution tore that country from end to end. To them, revolutionary politics and unbelief were inevitably to be found hand in hand. The phrase "infidel democracy"² was heard in all respectable circles. It was enough to connect the name of Owen (somewhat unfairly) with Chartism, to damn it forever in the eyes of the respectable, since the great "Industrial Reformer" was noted for his socialism and free thought. His name was as synonymous with infidelity as was that of Paine, and Podmore's analysis is more than fair - "from an early age he had lost all belief in the prevailing forms of religion. Indeed his whole movement was so penetrated by an anti-theological spirit that the clergy as a rule became its bitter enemies."³

With some justice, a great many of the Chartists

~~3 Robert Owen - Podmore Vol. i. p.238-242.~~

1 W. Huttman - "Life of Jesus" (1818).

2 e.g. Wesleyan Methodist Magazine. Feb. 1838. p.153.

3 Robert Owen - Podmore Vol. i. p.238-242

resented this particular line of attack. The movement had among its supporters thousands who, though they had no affiliation with any Church, felt themselves to be Christian in that they subscribed to what they believed to be the basic ethical standards of Christianity. Such people had a bitter hatred of ecclesiasticism in any garb, and felt that they themselves were more truly interpreting the mind of Christ than were the organised Churches. There were, of course, many Chartists who remained loyal members of particular denominations, but the churchless Christians constituted a far larger proportion than either the rationalists or the active supporters of organised Churches. Solly's Chartist workman "James Woodford", already quoted, was probably typical of these unattached Christians. They felt that clergymen merely carried out traditional ceremonies for the sake of the money received and that payment was out of all proportion to the service rendered. No very subtle distinction was made between the Nonconformist ministry and the Anglican priesthood in this respect, for the proletariat felt that neither had much of real value to offer.

No serious historian would contend that the worker had any dearth of evidence to support such a view. His employers seemed more than anxious to encourage those who could

1 "James Woodford" - Henry Solly p.214 ff.

convince the workers that the soul was of supreme importance, and that the miseries suffered by this body were of small moment. The life of the nineteenth century was marked by three basic assumptions. There was the assumption that a nation's commercial prosperity is a true index of her advancing civilisation, and, a corollary of this, that any legislation which tended to limit the productivity of the factories was an obstacle to progress. "It is this conviction which explains why men of the moral insight of John Bright could oppose the Factory Acts and why even so passionate a defender of democratic government as Lincoln should believe that a free society was one in which the energetic working man could hope to move upwards until he himself became an independent employer of labour." The second assumption was in line with Malthus's famous analysis of population, namely that whatever the degree of material prosperity of the nation, such was the niggardliness of Nature that there must be always large masses of people living at the lowest level of subsistence. It was because of this assumption that the mind of the worker in the nineteenth century was haunted by the idea of revolution, and the attitude of the middle-class coloured by their concept of the poor as a moral problem requiring their charity, rather than as a

social unit requiring specific legislation. The third assumption was even more directly based on the theory of Malthus, and the nightmare for many was that one day the population of the nation would outrun the country's ability to maintain the people even at the subsistence level.

These assumptions explain the willingness of commercial magnates to give large sums to build chapels, when they were strenuously opposed to any increase in the wages of their people.¹ Almost every town and village in Lancashire contains such a chapel erected by a local mill-owner of this time and sometimes such chapels were highly endowed to enable them to sustain an educated ministry. The fact that the employer had very often risen from the ranks of the workers in some cases lessened rather than increased his desire to ease the lot of his employees. Under the stress of fierce competition, the employer lost that sense of responsibility for his workers and that intimacy with them, which had characterised industrial life up to practically the end of the eighteenth century.

From the perspective of to-day it would appear that contemporary leaders and historians of the movement like Henry Solly were misled by what they felt was the indifference of the masses to the established Church. Actually be-

neath this cloak of indifference there lay a sense of bitterness, a feeling that the Church was inadequate in its philosophy of life for the industrial age in which they lived. They felt vaguely that the social doctrines of the Church in their traditional form offered little guidance in an age of impersonal finance, world-markets, and a capitalist organisation of industry; "they were merely repeated when, in order to be effective they should have been thought out again from the beginning and formulated in new and living terms..¹~~They were abandoned because, on the whole they deserved to be abandoned. they were abandoned.~~ The social teaching of the Church had ceased to exist because the Church itself had ceased to think.

It was this sense of the inadequacy of the existing churches which caused many of the Christians associated with the Chartist Movement to work out for themselves a specific programme of Church reform. More than that, in some cases they actually created Churches to give practical expression to the ideas they had gleaned from their study of the New Testament. It was doubtless the existence of these Churches which gave the incentive to the founding of the Christian Social Movement which William Temple declared should be

1. R.H. Tawney - "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism.pp.184-5

regarded as "the history of the recovery of a forgotten^{1.} part of Christian belief and practice." It has often been the custom to dismiss the Christian Socialism of Maurice and Kingsley as being quite out of line with any progressive political philosophy, but it did succeed in awakening^{1.} the conscience of many people, prompting them to compassion and to practical steps for the alleviation of suffering. Utterly inadequate as this seems to-day, it really was a step forward in the days when it was believed that "economic" laws must grind out fortunes for the few and misery for the many as unalterably as the stars move in their courses. Such awakening of conscience soon leads to another step, that of modification of the capitalist form of industrialism, some correction of abuses in a system believed to be in itself tolerable if worked properly. The Christian Socialists continued the work of Lord Shaftesbury who, in William Temple's phrase taught Christianity "to speak with the voice of law."²

Chartist Christians, following the pattern of many reformers, were inclined to reduce Christianity to a few basic quotations from the New Testament, which appeared to lend weight to theories they had formed in other departments

¹ Wm. Temple "Introduction to Christian Social Reformers of the Nineteenth Century".

² Temple - Ibid. p.106.

of life. A phrase such as "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Matt XXII - 39) and Christ's grand tableau of the sheep and the goats, with its devastating conclusion "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these ye did it not to me" (Matt XXV - 45) and large sections of the Sermon on the Mount", - these were the passages most quoted, which indeed contained to the Chartists all that appeared to be of importance in the Christian faith. "If one thing is more certain than another", declared a writer in one of their leading papers "it is this, that it is the duty of Christians to labour for the welfare of their fellow-men."¹

What need was there for an ordained priesthood or ministry, for sacraments, or indeed for all the paraphernalia of worship when the whole teaching could be summed up in a few commonsense golden rules? It cannot be surprising that to such people the Anglican Church with its highly paid and often worldly bishops, and its traditional ceremonies, should appear a futile parody of Christ's gospel of community, and that the dissenting Churches continually engrossed in defending their own particular dogmas should seem equally outside the main streams of life. To the Chartist it was a complete mystery, how anyone could profess discipleship for Christ and remain blandly indifferent to the misery of the proletariat, and J.R.

1 The People - pp. 19-20.

Stephens summed up the feeling of many when he went further and spoke not of the indifference of the Churches but of their having "joined hands with blooathirsty¹ and deceitful men to render the misery of the workers complete and irremediable."

It is futile however, to seek to discover in the average Chartist any clear consistency of principle. The leading Chartist orators in the campaign against the unchristian social outlook of the organised Churches, were usually men who had received their training in one denomination or another. The Methodist system of local preaching was often unwittingly and indeed, unwillingly, a useful channel for the continued supply of these social teachers. A modern writer hardly exaggerates when he declares - "The first fighters and speakers for unions, co-operative societies, political freedom and improved conditions, were Methodist preachers. That is beyond argument. And the gospel expressed in social terms has been more of a driving power in Northern mining circles than all the economic teaching put together."² Such men appealed fervently to their audience to "study the New Testament, for it contains the elements of Chartism,"³ and the inevitable corollary was added "Give your loyalty to the Charter, for it is a reflection of true Christianity."

1 Sermon¹ preached on Kennington Common, London, by Stephens in 1839.

2 Jack Lawson, M.P. - A Man's Life, p.67. LON 222-223

3 Chartist Circular, p.222.

It was along such lines that ¹occasional middle-class support and sympathy were won for the movement. That it did receive such support is evident from the fact that even though the working-class was outside the franchise, some of the leaders put up for seats and polled a respectable number of votes. Henry Vincent, for example, got 475 votes at Ipswich in 1842 against the top candidate's 651. In the same year, Joseph Sturge standing on the platform of the "Complete Suffrage Union" was only narrowly defeated in a by-election at Nottingham by 1885 to 1801 votes.² Joseph Sturge quite frankly admitted that he had been led to organise the "Complete Suffrage Movement" (the only specifically middle class attempt to bring into law one item of the Charter) by the influence of such Chartist Christian teaching. His biographer records this fragment of one of his speeches: "It is a distinguishing and beautiful feature of Christianity that it leads us to recognise every country as our country and every man as brother: and, as there is no moral degradation so awful, no physical misery so great, as that reflected by personal slavery, I have felt it my duty to labour for its universal extinction." His biographer later underlines this contention: "Nothing is more certain than that what was called the Chartism of Joseph Sturge sprang directly from his Christianity."²

1 British Working Class Politics - 1832-1914 - G.D.H.Cole.

2 Richard - Memoirs of Joseph Sturge p.229.

It was such lines of thought which led the Chartist to infer that if the Churches had been doing their duty and had been faithful to their task, they would have given the proletariat support in gaining political power. The Oxford Movement, and the tightening of authority in other branches of the Church, led organised religion to concentrate more and more on internal organisation and on those things which were felt to be the peculiar province of religious people. The view put forward by the "Society of Friends" that "to concern oneself with politics was almost sure to result in contamination, and was always fraught with danger to the spiritual welfare of the participant,"¹ was expressive of the feeling of the large majority of the Churches. A wide gulf existed between organised religion and the people, though the Chartists failed to realise that many members of the Churches were conscious of its existence, and were desperately anxious to build a strong and enduring bridge.

x 24.1

CHAPTER VI.

The Established Church in Chartist Times.

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"Things have come to a pretty pass if religion is going to interfere with private life." Lord Melbourne is said to have made this protest after attending a service at St. Paul's Cathedral in which the preacher had dealt with the attitude of the Church to social evils.¹ Whether the story be true or not, it certainly reflects accurately the general belief of respectable society in 1832 that religion and politics dealt with different aspects of life, and that there existed no essential connection between them. It was the fashion of the time to assume that religion had nothing to do with economics or with the process of government, and the Church tended to reproduce in its own life the pattern of secular society. There was a tacit assumption by the upper classes that their traditional privileges were faithfully protected by the Church of England, and in the Chartist era little happened to disturb that belief. The Hammonds have summarised this attitude in a bitter sentence:-

"A man looking to religion for an escape from the pattern of the world might find that he was looking into a mirror."²

¹ The year 1835 is commonly given as the time of the incident
² J.L.B. Hammond - The Age of the Chartist p.225.

aw.

The divisions of secular society were faithfully reflected in the "pew rent" system of the Church. By the early nineteenth Century this system of financing Churches had been in existence over three hundred years, but the Acts of Parliament of the time show that it had become a serious obstacle to the progress of the Church. When Parliament turned its mind to the need for more Churches, a series of acts were passed to encourage the erection of new buildings. This movement began in 1818. In the earliest of these Acts it was stipulated that a fifth of the seats in the Churches built with the help of public money should be free, and marked with the word "free"; in the second, that in all Churches rebuilt with the help of public money, half of the additional accommodation should be free. But it was soon discovered that the multiplication of buildings did little to remove a centuries-old tradition. A witness before the Commission charged with Church-building in 1832 put the position in these straightforward terms:-

"It is the object of the Commissioners for building new Churches, as far as they can, to intermingle the seats of the rich and the poor so as to afford the latter nearly the same facilities for hearing which the former enjoy. We have found considerable difficulty in realising our own

1 A.C.Heales - "History and Law of Church Seats or Pews" 1872. Vol. 1 pp.63 and 74. First recorded pew rents at St. Margaret's, Westminster in 1504.

wishes in that respect, on account of the objections which were made by the richer classes to too great an intermixture of the poor among them, objections which it was absolutely necessary to attend to, because the whole income of the minister depends on the pew rents accruing exclusively from the richer classes."

The High Church magazine, "The British Critic", attacked the principle of pew rents, "Observe - in the Churches of the metropolis and large manufacturing towns, the scanty space allotted for what are called, in the language of modern days, 'free sittings', while the larger part of the building is occupied with galleries for genteely dressed and profitable 'pews', and well may you ask for the palpable evidence of that blessed Gospel which has lifted the poor out of the mire of the beggar of the dust¹ that it may set them with princes." Clearly such reformers (who were strongly supported by "The Times") condemned pew rents and the general arrangement of many of the town Churches, on the ground that they made a distinction between rich and poor, and also on the ground that they destroyed the character of the Church as something more than a place where men and women assembled to hear sermons. This campaign for the abolition of pew rents made an appeal to the popular imagination. Hence when Oastler stood as Conservative candidate for

¹ British Critic Vol. 29, p.56.

Huddersfield in 1837, he put the question in his programme, saying that he would make every seat in the parish Church free to the first comer.

The Lancashire worker, a mere cog in a great industrial machine, came to resent bitterly the position of the clergy of the Established Church, and to regard them as allying themselves politically with the enemies of the common people. He was well aware how fiercely the clergy had opposed the Reform Bill of 1832, and more than half expected the even fiercer opposition which the Charter received from the same quarter. It is quite obvious that though Chartists were divided on many issues they were at one in their fear and hatred of the National Church. As late as 1851 we find a Convention of Chartists setting out recommendations for reform of the Church. The following summarises their chief recommendations:-

- (i) There was to be complete separation of Church and State.
- (ii) All Church temporalities were to be declared national property. (More often than not a few specific exemptions were given.)
- (iii) Church rates and tithes were to be abolished.
- (iv) All ministers were to be appointed by their respective congregations and to be paid by voluntary subscriptions.

(v)

- (v) Ecclesiastical licences were to be abolished¹
in the field of education.

To the Chartist Christians these represented the reforms that were essential, before they could regard the Anglican Churches as a fitting instrument for the religious life of the people.

It would be well for a moment to examine the Anglican Church as it appears in the generation before 1833. When George III died in 1820 the Church of England was not materially different in administration or in canons of worship, from what it had been when he came to the throne in 1760.² The intense and simple piety of the Evangelical movement, inspired by the Clapham sect, had never succeeded in leavening the solid mass of English Churchmanship. Its effect upon individuals or isolated groups had been intense and it had indeed succeeded in removing slavery, but it did not seriously change the main current of life in either the Church or the nation. The bishops were still kindly scholars who lived in great dignity apart from the parochial clergy, voted uniformly in Parliament for the party of the minister who had appointed them, wrote mighty tomes on obscure points of classical scholarship, and on great occasions visited the chief towns in their dioceses to hold confirmation services. Of their function as spiritual leaders of the nation's life they had only the vaguest notions.

Such a picture of the bishops is of course, an over-

¹ Gammage - History of the Chartist Movement p.371.

² H.O.Wakeman - History of the Church of England, ch.XX.

simplification. It does bring out, however, the defects of the method by which Church leaders were appointed. Since their appointments were purely political, their interests usually lay in that direction. Spending so much of their time in London or living the lives of county squires, they tended to have very little contact with their dioceses. Furthermore, on the whole they were separated from the mass of the clergy, by superior birth and connections.

In view of the background of the bishops it is not surprising to find that the Church was silent on the great social abuses of the time. Indeed no attempt was made to collect the opinions of the Laity on questions affecting the future of the Church and no organisation existed to give expression to them. Diocesan and ruri-decanal synods, if they existed, no longer functioned effectively, while Convocation met only in a formal way at the opening of each Parliamentary session and was not allowed to transact business. Cathedrals performed no real function and many Churchmen were inclined to regard them merely as interesting museums. Most of the Churches were open for about four hours in every seven days and when the services were held, they were conducted with scant attention to the traditional rubrics and entirely out of harmony with the spirit of liturgical worship. One curious revolution was that in most parish Churches a more prominent position had

been given to the pulpit than to the altar, which was¹
often of a mean and dirty appearance.

One principle, and one only, still remained vigorous and powerful, that of the strenuous maintenance of the alliance with the State. The constant aim of good Churchmen was to strengthen that alliance, and for such a purpose they were willing to sacrifice what was left of the independence of the Church, and to weaken what remained of her spiritual efficiency. When the spirit of the times was clearly moving in the opposite direction, when the Roman Catholics were at last granted the full privileges of citizenship, when it was clear that the Reform Bill was shifting the balance of power to the middle classes who were the backbone of Nonconformity, when the working classes had at last been aroused to fight for fundamental human rights; the Church could apparently do little to meet the crisis. The situation was unprecedented, for from now on the members of the House of Commons and the Ministers of State would be drawn from men of all denominations and from men outside the Christian faith. As such men might now legislate for the Church, it was clear that the relation of Church and State had been profoundly modified: Lord Grey, the Prime Minister, solemnly warned the Bishops to set their house in order. Many men thought the doom of the national Church imminent. Dr. Arnold was not alone in thinking that, "The Church as ~~it~~ now

¹ Wakeman - Ibid p.459

it now stands, no human power can save." Churchmen as a body seemed paralysed, ignorant where to go and what to do, divided in their aims and purposes. "What with aggressive enemies outside the walls and divided counsels within, it seemed as though the citadel would fall."¹

He is a poor student who sees unrelieved gloom in any age; yet it is difficult to find many bright features in an examination of the attitude of the Church of England to the poorer classes a century ago. Not merely were they pushed in hideous obscure corners in pews boldly labelled "free seats", but practically nothing was done to attract the children. Packed up in dangerous galleries, listening to long and tedious sermons, the condition of the children was truly pitiable. It is little wonder that so few continued to attend, once parental authority had been withdrawn.²

There is an extensive literature dealing with the social attitude and standards of the Anglican Church. There were undoubtedly many parish priests of great devotion, and ministering with zeal and conviction to their people. Alongside them, however, were others who had lost all sense of moral idealism and yet still continued to hold their office. There was for example, a certain Parson Griffiths,

¹ M.W.Patterson - A History of the Church of England.
Ch.XXI.

² See Clifton Kelway - Story of the Catholic Revival.

vicar for a time of the Old Church in Manchester. One couple arriving for a marriage service found him so drunk that they had to wait for the arrival of another minister. Being rebuked for drunkenness in Church on another occasion he exclaimed "'Tis a lie, I'm sober, sober as a judge, and I'll let you know it to your sorrow." He then advanced with a prayer book to inflict a blow, but as a witness says, "he reeled to and fro like a drunken man," An equally disgraceful incident is recorded in which he fell into a grave at a funeral and was pulled out making most blasphemous jokes.¹

Had the sins of the clergy been confined to drunkenness they might have been condoned in such a hard-drinking age, but unfortunately some of the clergy were libertines. The curate of Christchurch and Garston, Liverpool, a Reverend Mr. Vause, a man of learning, but of loose morals, extorted tithes greedily to waste them on immoral living. His approaches to female parishioners and neighbours were notorious. He ogled girls from the pulpit, and on one occasion during the singing of the psalms, pencilled a note to be² given to a strumpet as she left the Church.

In the light of the degradation in which it was possible for a clergyman to live and yet retain his benefice, there must inevitably be a certain sympathy with the stringent

1 Morse. - Boycott (Desmond) - "The Secret Story of the Oxford Movement". p.15 - 16.

2 Ibid p.16 - 17.

reforms demanded by the Chartists.

1. DIVISIONS OF THE CHURCH.

It is quite impossible to speak of the relation of the Anglican Church to the Chartists, for in a sense there were three Anglican Churches, or groups within the Church.

(i) The Evangelicals - who had their main centres in Cambridge and Clapham. They had played a noble part in philanthropic schemes such as the abolition of slavery, the reform of criminal law and of prisons but were now something of a spent force. By their carelessness of the intellectual side of the faith, and their failure to produce any great scholars, they lost influence and power outside their own narrow circle.

(ii) The Orthodox or High Church Party had in a sense maintained, with increasing casualness and imperfection the Laudian tradition of the seventeenth century. Though their ideas were in a state of extraordinary confusion, the mass of the clergy would have claimed adherence to this group. They had no clear conception of what "the Church" meant, and for the most part were simply Church and State men, strong believers above all else in the providentially ordered establishment. Standing out of the ruck, there were High Churchmen of the primitive type, men like Joshua Watson and the father of John Keble who carried on the

Laudian 1.
full tradition.

(iii) Finally there were Liberals or "Broad Churchmen" who professed indifference to creeds, dogmas and liturgies of all sorts. They were most tolerant towards the Nonconformist Churches, and some even held that the State ought to assume an indifferent or impartial attitude towards the different religious bodies.

On one point only at the opening of the Chartist era were these groups agreed, and that was that the Church was in danger. The clergy expressed their opposition to the new reforming spirit of the workers in the form most obviously convenient for them; innumerable sermons were preached denouncing the Chartists and all their works. A typical example of this type of sermon was that preached by the Rev. J. Slade in Bolton Parish Church entitled "The powers that be are^{2.} ordained of God", and reviewed in a Chartist publication. The sermon preached by Disraeli's fictional clergyman, the Rev. E. B. Were, in his novel *Sybil* is an excellent illustration of the general theme. The general thesis here was summed^{3.} up in the injunction "Fear God and honour the King." Not all of these sermons, of course, mentioned Chartism specif-

1. M. W. Patterson - 'A History of the Church of England'.

2. The People - p.283.

p.401.

3. Disraeli's "Sybil" p.392.

ically by name, but the hearers were left in no doubt as to the object of the preacher's denunciations. The standard of preaching in this age, as one would expect, was deplorably low, and the nimble wits of the Chartist editors were able to tear apart most of the indiscriminate denunciations of all reformers which characterised their utterance.

A number of sermons were preached on the Chartist agitation itself, after due notice had been given. The practice led in 1839 to a most interesting development. In that year the government severely restricted the movement of Chartist leaders and curtailed the rights of public meetings. In many Lancashire towns the workers expressed their indignation at these repressive measures by attending the local Parish Church in a body. Their intention, though not always clear, was apparently to shame the clergy into joining them in resisting this suppression of a fundamental democratic right. As the persecution grew in severity, so this method of showing displeasure with the authorities grew in popularity. On Sunday Aug. 11th (1839) nearly 4,000 Chartists filled the Bolton Parish Church at 9.30 a.m. and made it impossible for any of the regular worshippers to attend the service.^{1.}

This visit was in fact not unexpected, for in the neighbouring township of Blackburn on the previous Sunday,

1. Gentleman's Magazine. Vol. XIX p.301.

Dr. Whitaker, the vicar had preached a stirring denunciatory sermon to almost as great a number. Once again Disraeli's Chartist novel, "Sybil", is useful in revealing how keenly this type of demonstration gripped the imagination of the rank and file of the new reform movement. Gammage tells us that on such occasions the clergy nearly always preached upon passive obedience and the folly of looking to the things of this life. "It is hardly surprising that a worldly priest blessed with most of the luxuries of life, succeeded only in rousing to fever heat the indignation of his under-privileged audience¹ when he delivered such a sermon."

The Vicar of Blackburn's sermon and its reception are worth recording in some detail, as being in line with the normal procedure of this phase of the movement. So far as one can gather the local Chartist leaders had given Whitaker warning of the visit, and had asked him to preach in the words "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten" (James V 1 & 2). To this request Whitaker agreed, but seems to have skillfully evaded the issues involved. His main contention was that while the words when used by James had some justification, they had no relation

1. Gammage - Ibid p.153.

to the governing classes in England at that time. On the contrary England was a land where equality before the law was every man's inheritance, where indeed civil rights and public guarantees of liberty could be destroyed only by those who were themselves recipients of those benefits. Then leaving the text he quoted the great semi-political passage in Romans XIII - "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God , , , , , Render therefore to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom.....honour to whom honour."^{1.}

With such a foundation he found it perfectly simple to appeal to his hearers to obey those divinely set in authority over them. Not for the first time had those who quoted scripture to defend their own cause, found weapons drawn from the same armoury used to refute them. The preacher went on to quote "Submit yourself to every ordinance of men for the Lord's sake, whether it be the King as supreme..... or unto governors..... Honour all men... love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the King" (1 Peter II. 13, 14, & 17). With great boldness he told his audience that only one out of every forty or fifty was really a Chartist and accused the rest of being there out of idle curiosity or to associate themselves with an infamous

1. Quoted from Whitaker's printed sermon - mainly p.9.

movement and thereby gain cheap notority.

It is very doubtful if those demonstrations served any useful purpose on either side. The line adopted by the clergy tended to convince the workers of the essential hostility of the National Church to the cause of the poor and unfranchised, and gave the regular worshippers the impression that Chartists were in the main hooligans intent on desecrating the House of God. This latter impression was underlined on the occasions when a particularly vicious attack by the preacher led the Chartists to cause an uproar in the Church. In the last weeks of this campaign such incidents were numerous and lost the Chartists the sympathy of many humanitarian members of the Church.

The Chartist Press was quite naturally brought into action against those preachers and the "Chartist Circular" contains three general articles in reply under the general title "A Tilt with the Parsons"^{1.} A Lancashire minister in 1848 wrote a pamphlet under the title "No Revolution: A Word to the People of England" in which he gave a sketch of the situation of the Chartists in Lancashire.^{2.} Many of the immigrants to Lancashire had come from Ireland, and Stowell argued that the Chartist movement was an insurrection deliberately instigated by Irish

1. Chartist Circular. pp 193, 205, 237.

2. Rev. Hugh Stowell - printed in Manchester 1848.

Papists, some of them Jesuit spies, who employed English experts in agitation. He dismissed the idea of slavery in England as absurd, and ridiculed the suggestion that the legal system was designed to give an advantage to the rich over the poor. He accused the Chartists of resisting the ordinance of God in setting themselves in opposition to the civil authority.

It is difficult to believe that there is any substance in this charge against Irish labourers, for the General verdict is that Irishmen coming to this country in the last hundred years have generally been willing to accept conditions inferior to those actually prevailing. It is more than likely that this pamphlet was intended rather to stir up opposition to the Roman Catholics than to bring any reasoned opposition to the Chartist case. This is not to impugn in any way the sincerity of the pamphleteer, for fear of the Jesuits was very real and widespread in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Roman Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 included a clause declaring that any Jesuit or member of a similar religious Order could be expelled at once from the realm if found guilty of any misdemeanour. In point of fact the clause was never^{1.} rigorously enforced.

It is difficult to find any clearly defined differences

1. Clause XXIX of the Catholic Emancipation Act.

in the attitude taken up by the three sections of the Church of England towards the Chartist movement. The magazines which expressed the viewpoints of these schools of thought were practically unanimous in rejecting, utterly and completely, all the points of the Charter. The most reasoned expression of their opposition to the workers' claims appeared in the "English Review" - the organ which tended to follow the line of the High Church Group. Here was presented the thesis that liberty implies a division of power, such as then existed in England. The upper classes expressed their power through the House of Lords, the middle-classes through the House of Commons, while the common people could exercise a share in Government by debate at public meetings and by a show of hands at gatherings held to nominate candidates for Parliament. Change, apparently could only lead to some form of dictatorship which would disturb this ideal balance of power. In 1851, three years after the final fiasco of 1848, the same paper comments that Chartism, far from being defunct, was merely substituting the idea of change by revolution for the idea of the gradual demolition of the constitution of Church and State.^{1.} In the field of fiction Kingsley presents a typical Anglican clergyman as dismissing all this talk of freedom and brother-

1. English Review Vol IX pp 194-196.
English Review Vol XVI. p. 56.

hood as dangerous nonsense and declaring emphatically, "we don't want anything of that kind here."^{1.} Though in the opposition to the new Poor Law and the movement for Factory Reform some clergymen found contact with the Radical Reformers, the picture presented in the "English Review" and by Kingsley, is in the main accurate.

Revival in the High Church.

The beginnings of Chartism more or less coincided in point of time with a revival of "Classical High Churchmanship" in a section of the Church. To this revival, since it had its inception at the great University, was given the title of "The Oxford Movement." In the Church itself the main influence of this revival was felt in a greater and richer liturgical ordering of the service, in a restatement of the Divine authority of the Church, and in a deeper devotion of the clergy to spiritual matters, but it had political and social implications which cannot be ignored. It has been defined as a "New Sacerdotalism" but it would be equally true to define it as a new Toryism. As Anglo-Catholicism has spread in the last fifty years partly because the clergy have lost their superior social standing, so the Oxford Movement rose

1. Kingsley - Alton Locke P.154.

partly from the Church's loss of legal superiority to dissenters and Roman Catholics, and also from the attack they feared from the Utilitarians.

From 1833 to 1840 the movement experienced almost undreamed-of success. Under the able leadership of Dr. Pusey (Professor of Hebrew in the University), Richard Hurrell Froude, and John Henry Newman, men throughout the country rallied to the standard. In the years 1833 to 1844 no less than fifty-six "Tracts for the Times" were published, dealing with almost every controversial point of Church teaching and bringing together a long string of quotations from the best-known Anglican divines in favour of the position taken up.¹ These tracts, collected in a volume with an introduction by Newman in 1834, spread high Church doctrines throughout dozens of parishes in England. Men were once more brought face to face with the question "What is the Church? Is she more than the legal establishment of religion, more than a religious club where individuals may get what they think will do them good? Has she divine credentials, immutable principles? Can she of her own right claim authority to teach? Has she inestimable privileges at her disposal? And if so, what is their exact

1. M. W. Patterson. - "A History of the Church of England".
Ch.xxi.

H. O. Wakeham. - "History of the Church of England".
p.464 ff.

nature? These questions are representative of those set and answered in the early tracts and answered, more often than not, by reference to St. Ignatius or St. Augustine or the great traditional theologians of the Roman Church. The tendency in such a theological approach was to re-emphasise the past.

The same tendency revealed itself in the Tractarian attitude to political and social questions, for here the same scholars were wont to look back to a golden age Froude was described by Newman not merely as 'the bright and beautiful Froude' but also as "a Tory of the old Cavalier stamp"¹ a reference to the past only too obvious in its implications. Newman himself regarded all revolutionary movements with genuine distaste. Travelling abroad with Froude in 1832, he is reported as refusing to leave his cabin when the boat called at Algiers, in case he should be compelled to look upon the "Tricolour Flag", the symbol of the pagan revolutionaries of France. His mind dwelt rather upon the bygone glories of Church and state under the Holy Roman Empire, than upon the necessity of political and social change in an age of unprecedented industrial expansion. To Dr. Pusey the idea of unquestioning obedience was in itself a supreme virtue for the individual. It was easy for any member of the Oxford Movement

1. Newman's "Apologia" p.48.

to preach the type of Anti-Chartist sermon to which reference has already been made, and from this base of holy obedience to spiritual and secular authorities to condemn unsparingly the lawlessness of the time.

It was not long before the Oxford Movement found a suitable ally in the political life of the times, indeed a party which the movement itself was largely instrumental in creating and in shaping. It is easy to build a bridge between Newman and Disraeli, between the "Tractarian Movement and the rise of the 'Young England Party'. The social philosophy of Disraeli's "Sybil" (1844) and his "Coningsby" (1845) show the parallel trend of the two movements. This new political party was dedicated to the purpose of restoring to the Church her mediaeval glory and prestige, to free her from the shackles of the State and to make her a powerful agent in shaping the life and opinions of the common people. Politically and in alliance with this ecclesiastical purpose it intended to restore to the monarch the prerogatives he had held in an England predominantly under the sway of the Roman Church, to abolish class legislation and to shape the government to a new age without any great change in social structure. Indeed Disraeli's Chartist novel "Sybil" is concerned with what he feels are the two great evils of the hour, "the oppression of the Church, and the degradation of the poor."¹ This linking so closely of the aims of the two

1. Disraeli's "Sybil" p.128-9.

parties, one ecclesiastical and the other political, is both instructive and indicative of the attitude of large sections of the upper classes. Disraeli longs for the day when the Church will be able to exercise her great medieval virtue of Charity, and take her place as a mediator between the people and a benevolent though despotic State authority. Though such ideas undoubtedly made an appeal to Chartist followers of J. R. Stephens, they were repugnant to the leaders and rank and file of the Chartist movement as a whole, since they denied the right of the workers to independence both in matters of faith and of labour. Dierlamm finds an essential opposition between the average Chartist and the follower of Disraeli's¹ "Young England Movement".

In retrospect both the Tractarian Movement and the "Young England Party" appear as pathetic attempts to maintain a traditional political and religious system in a society which had long outgrown them. The editor of the "English Review" was right in fearing that what the Chartists failed to accomplish by spectacular means, they would accomplish by the erosion of circumstances.

Liberals and Christian Socialism.

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As a general rule the liberals in the Anglican Church

have been referred to as Broad Churchmen or, in more theological language, as the Latitudinarians. The liberals were the product of two tendencies. Generations of religious strife had produced in many men a sense of sheer weariness; they were willing to drop the shibboleths of contending factions and to ground themselves on what they considered to be "fundamental Christianity". This sense of weariness was reinforced by an appeal to reason, and they came to think of conflict on "non-fundamental" matters as not only tiresome but as irrational and irrelevant. This appeal to reason and a real toleration of other denominations were the chief features of Broad Churchmanship before the birth of Chartism. Such Churchmen hated enthusiasm when expressed in terms of irrational emotionalism. They laid tremendous emphasis on the moral obligations of the Christian faith and contended that Christianity implied a definable code of ethics. They laid little more weight on the efficacy of sacraments than did the Nonconformists.

With the awakening of the working -man through the agency of Chartism, Broad Churchmen became aware of the depth to which infidelity had bitten into the life of the English proletariat. After the fiasco of 1848 and the defeat of Chartism, there arose from this group the school of Christian Socialists. To Frederick Denison Maurice the real struggle of the day was between Atheism and Christianity, while Kingsley

feared that whatever the issue, Christianity might be destroyed in the struggle. Thus while the inspirers of the Oxford Movement looked to a return to a primitive golden age, these more practical Christians were actuated by a desire to relate the Christian Church to the new age and the entirely new framework within which it had to operate. They became convinced that the Church had long since ceased to exercise her responsibility in the political and economic ordering of society which they felt came plainly within the purview of the historic faith.

The Christian Socialists almost alone realised that the fiasco of Kennington Common in 1848, represented a movement which could not simply be laughed out of existence. On May 6th of that year they published the first copy of "~~P~~olitics for the People", a work which by modern standards appears almost conservative in tone. Physical Force Chartism even in the milder varieties, such as demonstrations and collection of signatures, was condemned, and the idea of votes being granted to an illiterate populace ridiculed.¹ At the same time, however, it did contain a plea for social justice for the working-man. None of the writers believed even the achievement of the "Six Points" would accomplish very much, and Maurice dismissed them as the "unrighteous pretensions" of the Chartists. Kingsley had no bitterness towards the Charter, but felt that even its achievement would touch only the fringe of the problem.

He cannot see how men's sinful hearts and selfish wills can be changed by an Act of Parliament. To him the French cry of "Organisation of Labour" was worth a thousand of the Chartists' vague dreams.

The rise of the Christian Socialist Movement was convincing evidence that there existed in the Church of England some measure of sympathy with the plight of the workers and with the ideals of the Chartists; a sympathy which till then had been hidden for fear of revolutionary methods. Once that fear had been removed, Christian leaders were able to take up the work of reform where political firebrands had left off. The story of their success is written in the social life of the country and their contribution has been examined in detail in a separate chapter.

CHAPTER VII

Methodism and Politics

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One man only in the history of modern England bears comparison with the great continental reformers like Luther and Calvin; that man is John Wesley (1703-1791). He gave birth to Methodist Societies, at a time when the Church of England, absorbed in a narrow sense of its own dignity, was dying, when Puritan Nonconformity had sacrificed any chance of real advance by settling down to the dreary task of merely maintaining its existence; when, indeed, organised Christianity in England had ceased to be anything but a series of conventional acts carried out by fewer and fewer people. Wesley restored to the traditional Nonconformist Churches, a real faith in their own distinctive principles, and by depriving the Anglican Church of many of its keenest adherents, compelled it to put up a real fight for the maintenance of its own life. It is true that it was no part of his intention to form a new denomination, he died still a member of the Church of England, but he had already revealed the possibility of providing for the religious needs of the masses outside any system of "State Administration".

It is a gross mistake, however, to assume that Wesley's importance lay merely in the religious field, for it was the success of the Methodist Class-meetings which created the technique by which, years later, the masses were given a class consciousness and directed into one great political aim.¹ This is astonishing, in view of Wesley's undoubted hatred of revolutionary movements, and of the intensely conservative attitude taken up by those who governed the Methodist Connexion after his death. As late as 1831, during the agitation for the first "Reform Bill", we find this distrust of any movement seeking to alter the Constitution still prevalent. The Methodist Conference refused to concern itself with the question of Parliamentary reform, and was content to exhort the faithful, not to neglect the salvation of their souls from an excessive zeal for the political issues of the day, "We live in times of great political ferment and agitation. Take heed to yourselves, brethren, 'lest your hearts be overcharged with cares of this life'. Let not worldly politics engross too much of your time and attention."² Even during the historic campaigns of 1832 when practically the whole populace was raised to a fever of enthusiasm over the question of Reform, official Methodism still maintained this other-worldly attitude. Thus the Address to Conference that year declared, "We remind you that

1 Wilhelm Dibelius. - "England". p.381 ff.

2 Minutes of Conference - Vol.VII. pp174, 1831-1832.

the Kingdom which you seek 'is not the world'. You may innocently exercise the privileges which belong to you as members of civil society;..... but can you, with perfect security to your religious character and peace at heart, become the ardent agents of political parties?"

From the evidence available it can scarcely be doubted that those who directed the policies of the Methodists were in the main Tories. It was their leading minister of the first part of the Nineteenth Century, the Rev. Jabez Bunting, who declared that "Methodism was as much opposed to democracy as to sin."¹ Conference quite specifically discouraged Methodists from joining in the crusades of the other Non-conformist Churches for the Disestablishment of the Church of England. Indeed, Wesleyan Methodists tended to repudiate all efforts to class them with the Dissenters, and ostentatiously adopted a position of neutrality as between the Church and the sects, and aimed at infusing into both, a new spirit of evangelical faith. They had quite unwillingly become detached from the Anglican Church, and refused consistently to aid those who would rob it of the privileges of the Establishment. They deplored "the high controversies on foot, both as to civil and ecclesiastical affairs", regarded "forms of Church Government as unessential" and warned the faithful of "the danger of listening with too warm an interest to such debates."²

¹ Minutes of Conference - Ibid.

² Address of the Conference of 1833. Minutes Vol.VII.p.306.

By the Chartist era, it had become increasingly difficult for the Methodist Church to maintain this complete aloofness from public questions. In a time of such rapid social and economic change as the first half of the nineteenth century, an organisation which refused to discuss measures of reform rapidly came to be regarded as irrelevant. From time to time, sporadic revolts broke out among the members of the societies, but Bunting led Conference to braving and overcoming their opposition. The price Conference paid for this spiritual detachment was high, for the early years of the nineteenth century witnessed the breaking away of several groups from the parent body. A Wesleyan minister in the Manchester area, Joseph Rayner Stephens, without referring the matter to his Superintendent, accepted the position of secretary of a "Church Separation Society". He was suspended from the ministry as having offended against "the peaceable and anti-sectarian spirit of Wesleyanism."¹ This was the signal for a revolt among the Lancashire Methodists. A large number of laymen, led by a minister named Warren, took possession of a number of chapels, and refused to accept the authority of the Superintendent. Conference took the matter to the Civil Courts and won the case.

1 a. Address of the Conference of 1833 - Minutes Vol.VII.
p.305-306.
b. Minutes of Conference Vol.VII. p.417-419.
c. See Chapter VIII.

For the first time, this gave Conference a determinate legal status as the responsible authority for Wesleyanism. The Vice-Chancellor's judgment reveals the tolerance with which Methodism was regarded by the ruling classes - "to this body we are indebted for a large portion of the religious feeling which exists among the general body of the community, not only of the country, but throughout a great portion of the civilised world besides."¹

The Tories soon began to show signs of favour to so unsectarian a sect.² In the House of Lords, the Archbishop of Canterbury publicly thanked them for the attitude which they had adopted in the contest between the Church and the Non-conformists.³ The Bishop of Exeter (Dr. Phillpotts), who was known for the intolerance of his Churchmanship and for his Toryism, pleaded with them in the most friendly terms to return to the "Mother Church", and a persistent rumour was current to the effect that negotiations were taking place between Bunting and himself for a reunion of Methodists and Anglicans.⁴ It is characteristic of the times that, in spite of this attitude, the Wesleyan Methodist Church grew rapidly in numbers. Only during the four years of the crisis caused by the Warrenites did the number of Wesleyans in Great

1 J.F.Hurst - History of Methodism Vol.III. p.368.

2 Disraeli's Coningsby Bk.II. Ch.II.

3 House of Lords - August 1st 1834. (Parl. Deb. 3rd Sec. Vol XXV. p.860.)

4 Christian Advocate - Sept. 10, 1833.

Britain remain almost stationary at about 290,000. Then the upward trend began again. The following table gives some indication of the general increase in membership.

ANNUAL STATISTICS

<u>Year</u>	<u>Membership</u>
1830	248,592
1833	279,970
1834	291,939
1835	290,988
1836	293,132
1837	292,693
1838	296,801
1839	307,063
1840	325,178 ¹ .

How can these rising figures be reconciled with the increasing suspicion with which the Methodist Church was regarded by the Lancashire operative? In the industrial North, Methodism had lost the fascination of a new revival movement.

¹ Elie Halévy - A History of the English People 1834-1841.
translated by E.I. Watkin) p.158.

In some parts of England and Wales, even in Chartist times, it still retained all the characteristics we associate with a rebirth of a religion. Thus, the Commission on the Employment of Children in 1843 gave a glowing account of the work done by the Methodists in districts like the Forest of Dean and North Wales, closely resembling the description of Wesley's work in Cornwall.¹ In Lancashire, however, Methodism was regarded as one of the traditional religious organisations, rather ^{than} as a vivid and passionate revival movement. Many of the people were immigrants from the South or from Ireland, and had no memory of the days when the first Wesleyan Chapels were erected.

In the north of England, then, Methodism had lost its initial Missionary fervour, and, like the Established Church, had fallen under the shadow of respectability. In the early days, weavers attended Chapel quite happily in their aprons, but by the 1830's only the boldest dared to appear at worship in such garments. As in the Anglican Church, social distinction was preserved by means of pew rents, the less prominent (and less comfortable) seats being marked "free", and reserved for those who paid no fixed sums. In all fairness, it must be pointed out that this custom was contrary to a strict injunction given by Wesley himself.

¹ Journal of the Royal Statistical Society 1840. p.152.

In December 1787, Wesley had a long discussion with his Committee on this point, and he records a resolution in his "Journal" - "We had another meeting of the Committee, who after a calm and loving consultation, judged it best that none should claim any pew of his own, either in the new Chapel or in West Street."¹ Molesworth, the Vicar of Rochdale (famous for his conflict with John Bright on the question of Church Rates), spoke of "the desire of the builder, the proprietor and the popular preacher to get good interest for his capital" as "an evil common alike to the Church and Nonconformity."

Few questions have been so hotly debated as the exact influence on English social life of the Methodist Revival. Carlyle's judgment was extreme and probably unjust.

"Methodism with its eye forever turned on its own navel; asking itself with torturing anxiety of Hope and Fear, 'Am I right? am I wrong? Shall I be saved? Shall I not be damned?.... what is this at bottom, but a new phase of Egoism, stretched out into the Infinite? not always the heavenlier for its infinitude.'"² It is just as true to say that there were thousands of people in Manchester and Liverpool who found self-respect and contentment in the duties and dreams of their religion. The spiritual atmosphere

¹ Journal - Curnock's Standard Edition, Vol.10. pp.349-50.

² Thomas Carlyle - Past and Present, p.161.

of the class-meeting made numbers of men and women happier, more unselfish, more ready to pity the sorrows of their fellow-men, more ready to undertake burdens for their relief. The Methodist Revival stimulated in the lives of many a sense of deep compassion, and related the ideas of the brotherhood of man to the fundamentals of religion. Nevertheless J.L. & B. Hammond take the view that while communal good came from this Evangelical Revival it was a limited and unreal benefit, and they are inclined to the opinion that it hindered rather than helped social progress, and was unfavourable in its effects to working-class movements.¹

Lately, however, this view has been hotly contested by Methodist scholars, particularly by J. Wesley Bready² and W.E. Sangster.³ Dr. Bready appears to set out with the intention of proving that the Methodist Revival was the dynamic behind the movement for social reforms, and that Wesley was in a sense the inspirer and pioneer of such movements. He argues with great ingenuity but finds it difficult to establish a case. Again and again the student comes up against the indisputable fact that, in all Wesley's works, there is no criticism of the constitutional order of the society in which he lived, and no suggestion that the workers ought to have a say in the work of government.

1 J.L. & B. Hammond; The Town Labourer 1760-1832, pp. 277-87.

2 Wesley Bready - "England - Before and After Wesley" p. 225 ff.

3 W. E. Sangster - "The Path to Perfection" pp. 168-184.

Wesley was born and bred and educated in an ultra-conservative environment; his whole tradition of life was conservative, and even his conversion failed to free him from this traditional bias. He handed down this bias to those who succeeded him in authority. Indeed to the student of social history there is a weary monotony at the first reading about Wesley's Journal, for its author insists again and again that his mission is to change souls. If it is read carefully in conjunction with his other writings it will be seen that this "new religion", thought more often in terms of social salvage than of social reform. The early Methodist societies gave birth to a hundred philanthropies. The sick, the widow, the orphan, the unemployed, the drunkard, the prisoner, - thieves, harlots, smugglers, slaves; all were recipients of their care. If they did not give sufficient thought to the economic background of the drink problem, or of the prostitute, or why coast dwellers prayed for a wreck, that lack of reflection did not prevent them naming the most debased outcasts, in Ostrogorski's noble phrase, as their 'Fellow-men'. Thus Ostrogorski writes "They appealed always and everywhere from the miserable reality to the human conscience. They made one see the man in the criminal, the brother in the negro. They introduced a new personage into the social and political world of Aristocratic England - the fellow-man."

This 'fellow-man' never leaves the stage.¹

It is this concept of the 'fellow-man' which marks the real contribution of the Evangelical Revival to English social and economic life. The emphasis placed by Wesley on individual salvation, and his unswerving loyalty to the government of his day, have led to the superficial criticism that he was so anxious to teach men to love God that he forgot to remind them of their duty to love one another. G.M. Trevelyan gives a more balanced estimate: "The way of life which came to be called 'Methodism' was older than its name and older than the mission of the Wesley Brothers. It was a way of life devoted not only to religious observance, but to self-discipline and to work for others. 'Methodism' in one form or another inspired much of the philanthropic work of the century that ended with Wilberforce."²

It is true that this philanthropy, first expressed itself in concern for the neighbour who lived at a distance; that is, in the great humanitarian movement to abolish slavery, and in the founding of Missionary Societies by the Anglican Church and by a number of the Nonconformist Communion. Gradually, however, the social telescope was replaced by the microscope, and inevitably the widespread

¹ Ostrogorski - La Democratie p.110.

² G.M. Trevelyan. "English Social History", p.261.

acceptance of the Christian value of man led to the creation of a more humane organisation of society in this country. The rebirth of vital Christianity was impossible without re-discovering that even the human relationships involved in industry must be regulated in accordance with the supreme moral principle of equal love to self and neighbour.

It is easy to forget, in the face of Wesley's conservative attitude to the social evils of his day, that he was not, and never claimed to be, either a politician or an economist. He did not formulate social theories, nor did he ever indicate that he regarded himself as competent to do so. Yet one unbiassed writer has written of him; "The independence of Wesley's mind was illustrated in his equal attitude to rich and poor. It may be truly said of him that he never thought the better of any man or woman for being rich, or famous, or titled. His supreme concern was with the spiritual life, and he judged others as they appeared to him to be rich or poor in faith and piety."

It was this insistence by Wesley on the value of each human personality, his constant affirmation of the value of the individual conscience, and the responsibility of each person before God, which led up to the successful reform movements of the second half of the nineteenth century. It was a happy coincidence for England that Evangelical religion and the Industrial Revolution came to life almost simultaneously,

1 C. Silvester Horne. "A Popular History of the Free Churches" p. 271

for the Methodist Church, with its ceaseless reiteration of the spiritual side of human life, presented a formidable challenge to the idea of "economic man" which dominated the thinking of so many of the early industrialists. Probably quite unwittingly, Methodism was the instrument of far-reaching social changes.

Emphasis has often been placed on the narrowness of the early Evangelicals, and the tendency has been to judge the relation between their religious faith and their social conduct by present-day standards. By such standards, it has been easy to condemn the early Victorian age and describe it as a time when men practised private virtues and public vices. To-day, an employer who worked eight year old children ten or eleven hours a day would be regarded as an utterly selfish and vicious brute. If such an employer held a position of leadership in the local Chapel and at the same time forbade the children to sing anything but hymns or psalms during their working hours, he would be stigmatised as an absolute humbug. Such employers existed in the early nineteenth century, but the assessment of their conduct by modern standards is as unfair as it is unprofitable. Such an employer may have been a vicious hypocrite, who lived an immoral life in private, while appearing in public as a sincere Churchman and supporter of good causes. He may, also, have been a kindly and intelligent man who accepted the economic theories of his own day, and believed that

only by producing a maximum amount of goods at a minimum cost in labour would the increasing population of the country be fed, and that the sufferings of the poor on earth were of no importance when weighed in the balance against the eternal salvation which awaited all the righteous. The fact that even kindly and intelligent individuals held such beliefs made it inevitable that they could not last, for it was impossible to maintain indefinitely the position that Christian responsibility was a duty everywhere except in economic life.

It is clear, then, that even the leaders of the Evangelical Revival were in many respects still men of their own time, and the movement did not at once effect as great changes in the social and political fields, even in moral standards, as in religious life: the full effects followed slowly. The demand for popular education which followed in the wake of the Revival was a direct outcome of Wesley's genius (and that of some of his followers) for creating, editing, and distributing literature to all types of people. The faith of the early Methodists centred almost exclusively on the Bible, and Wesley himself taught that one could never be "a thorough Christian" without extensive reading of the Scriptures.¹ Thousands of his followers learned to read in order to become more and more acquainted with the Bible,

1. John Wesley. "Works". Vol. I. p. 254.

and, having acquired the art, continued to extent the scope of their reading. "Every home deeply affected by the Revival, had its little collection of much-pondered books, and almost every convert helped to distribute the printed message."¹ In such homes, the desire for education for children was born, and it was impossible to widen the circle of educated people without bringing some understanding of the immense social evils which beset the country. It is doubtless such contributions as these which led Augustine Birrell to conclude his survey of John Wesley's life and influence with this generous tribute: "No single figure influenced so many minds, no single voice touched so many hearts, no other man did such a life's work for England."²

"Wesley" writes Dr. Fitchett, "restored Christianity to its place as a living force in the personal creed of men and in the life of the nation."³ He did this by the "foolishness of preaching", though his own style lacked many of the features we associate with revivalist preaching. Calm, self-possessed, cogent, searching, he yet produced on large audiences, composed of many classes of people, an effect that was quite extraordinary. He kindled heart after heart with the flame which burned in his own life, and, one after another,

1 Bready. "England Before and After Wesley," p.367.

2 Quoted by C.S.Horne "A Popular History of the Free Churches" p.282.

3 Quoted by Leslie F. Church. "Knight of the Burning Heart," p.153.

hopeless and depressed people found a purpose in living. He awakened the conscience of England to a new sense of right and wrong, and it ^{is} probably fair to say that the spiritual revolution he inspired saved England from the almost inevitable excesses and suffering of a political revolution. There has been a tendency of recent years to depreciate this contribution of the early Evangelicals, but the valuation of individual personality in those European countries which did, in fact, pass through the fires of a political revolution, should leave no doubt as to how much our own democracy owes to Wesley and the Evangelicals in general.

They did not change the face and framework of society overnight, nor did they, in the twinkling of an eye, rid the country of poverty and the evils consequent on the transition from an agricultural way of life to an industrial society. But the movement they inspired, slowly and surely, quickened the conscience of men and women in every class, and in the course of a few generations Christian leaders accomplished what revolutionary efforts failed to achieve. It is known that Wesley favoured the abolition of slavery, but it is not so well known that he pleaded courageously for this reform, when it was so unpopular that even the great contemporary evangelist George Whitefield owned slaves. His

humanitarian instincts were revealed in his constant visits to prisons, in his local schemes to open Church premises as workshops providing yarn where poor women might weave and earn an honest livelihood. He established schools and orphanages and opened dispensaries for the poor. In countless ways, he tried to apply the teaching of Christ to everyday life, although in all this he was motivated, primarily, by an urge to save souls - the souls of all men, rich and poor, great and humble, for each was important as a "fellow-man".

His concern for the souls of ordinary men and women convinced Wesley that "Christianity is essentially a social religion, and to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it". This humanitarian attitude was his way of expressing that principle, and it was the social standpoint he intended his followers to adopt. His brother Charles, who was something of a snob before his conversion, came to regard his "fellow-men" in the same way. Two days after his conversion, Charles Wesley summed up this spirit in a verse of a hymn:

"Outcasts of men, to you I call,
 Harlots and publicans and thieves !
 He spreads His arms to embrace you all;
 Sinners alone His grace receives -
 He calls you now, invites you home,
 Come, O my guilty brethren, come."

Dr. Sangster tends to stress this humanitarian element in early Methodism, and does not suggest that Wesley and his followers were inspired by any desire to reshape the framework of the society. For this reason, his views on Methodism's contribution to social progress are probably more balanced than those of his colleague Dr. J.W. Bready, and he is less prone to strain the interpretation of certain phrases in the "Journal". Yet even he is led to draw quite a false inference from the fact that so many Methodists were to be found in the Chartist movement. In disagreement with the secular historians of this period, Sangster claims, as an incontestable fact, that "many early leaders of the Trades union movement were Methodists, and that their passion for social progress was not at variance with their religion, but related to it." This is a most dangerous half-truth. It is true that such Methodist Chartists felt that support of the workers' crusade was consistent with their faith, but in many cases they speedily discovered it to be inconsistent with their allegiance. Such people tended to join the new Chartist Churches, the Baptist Churches, or to associate themselves with the more democratic offshoots of Methodism. Dr. Rattenbury quite clearly had these people in mind when he declared that "historians like the Hammonds have erred in assuming the Wesleyan Conference to reflect the opinion of

practically all Methodists on all matters".^I

It is worth emphasising the point that the wide gulf of the Industrial Revolution (as well as the political revolution inspired by the French 'First Republic') separated Wesley from the Methodist Church in Chartist times, and the Society had not moved from the position of its founder. It was still inclined to apply, in an entirely new age and setting, Wesley's ideas - however naive and foolish they might appear against the background of early Victorian life. Jabez Bunting and Conference still tried to apply the first-aid work of charity to a society which required a major operation. It was enough that Lancashire Methodists should classify Chartism as democratic, for the Church leaders to condemn it out of hand. They seemed quite unable to understand that the very humanitarianism evinced by Wesley had led quite logically to this sterner demand for social justice, and still sought to make the poor satisfied with their material lot, and acquiescent in the face of glaring social inequalities, by applying the same type of charity. An even more serious criticism by the workers was that though the leaders declared themselves outside politics, they maintained within the House of Commons a Committee of

I. J.E. Rattenbury - "Wesley's Legacy to the World". p. 226

Privileges which took political action when the interests of the controlling authorities were clearly involved. I It is noteworthy that the Methodist Church alone of the Nonconformist bodies remained aloof from the Anti-Corn Law League. It is possible to think of excellent reasons why a Christian organisation should have suspected the motives at least of some leaders of the League, but Methodist ministers were forbidden to take^{part}/merely because the movement resisted the Government of the day. The policy of Conference was to maintain the constitutional status quo. Ebenezer Elliott, a Methodist supporter both of Chartism and the League, and celebrated as the poet of the working-class movement, has put his own reaction to Conference's injunction to Political Neutrality in a rhyme:

"Ask ye if I, of Wesley's followers one,
 Abjure the house, where Wesleyans bend the knee
 I do, because the spirit there has gone;
 And truth and faith and grace are not with thee
 The hundred Popes of England's Jesuitry." 2.

The Methodist leaders apparently worked on the assumption that political agitation turned men's eyes outward

1. Formed in 1803.

2. The Ranters Vol.I. p.145 of the 1840 Edition of his verse

away from the truly spiritual things and led to the wreck of all piety and a weakening of loyalty to the religious organisation. For this reason they made much of the infidelity of the Chartists, and adopted that line of abuse, rather than made any real attempt to answer their basic arguments. Along this line they opposed with obstinacy and bitterness the Chartists' aim to separate the Anglican Church from the State. Indeed Wesleyans were almost unanimously of the belief that the Establishment should be maintained "as one of the main bulwarks of the Protestant Faith." ¹

The typical Chartist battle cry of "More pigs and fewer parsons" distressed the Wesleyan leaders far more than the clergy of the Anglican Church, and they were constantly reminding the rank and file that "the only effectual remedy for the ills and sufferings of our fallen world and our unhappy country is to be found in the glorious gospel of the blessed God." ²

As long ago as 1879 Dr. R.W. Dale spoke of the failure of the ~~post~~ French Revolution Methodist Church to develop for a new age the doctrine of its founder. He took in particular John Wesley's doctrine of "perfectionism"

1. Minutes Vol. Iv. p. 557.

2. Minutes Vol. XI. p. 501.

(i.e. the doctrine of perfect sanctification) which he felt ought to have led to great moral developments, and, by implication, to social changes, but which in fact did not grow and remained exactly where Wesley left it. He declared that, in practice, Methodists had shrunk from applying this standard to the ~~new~~ problems of an industrial age, for such an application would have originated a spiritual and social revolution greater in its effects on nineteenth century life than that of the Reformation in the seventeenth century.^I

Quite clearly then both the political economy and the religion of the period were fatalistic and reasoned that "Whatever is, is best." Laissez-faire economy popularly held that enlightened self-interest and uncontrolled competition would work in the best interest of the labourer in the long run; that the increase of population was regulated by the food supply; and that the wages fund was fixed by natural causes. The community was regarded as consisting primarily of property owners, and people "thought that if society looked after the capitalist, the capitalist would look after the workman, and that if society took care of the interests of property, the deserving

I.
 poor would become rich". Methodism (i.e. Wesleyanism) taught the same acceptance of existing conditions from the religious point of view. Providence had ordained for each his place and his circumstances and had provided spiritual comfort and the hope of another and better world. As the Hammonds put it; "Whereas one man looking out on the chaos of the world calls for reform, the other calls for contemplation. One says, 'who can tolerate such injustice ?' The other says, 'who would not rejoice that there is another world ?' One says, 'Give these people the conditions of a decent life'; the other says, 'Teach them to read the Bible'.. the economist besought the reformer not to quarrel with nature; the Christian might warn him not to quarrel with the dispensations of God. For such minds Christianity was not a standard by which to judge the institutions of society,² but a reason for accepting them."

All this, however, was in notable contrast to the policy adopted by the offshoots of Wesleyanism. The Methodist New Connexion declared itself as standing for "representation of all interests, freedom of Commerce, voluntary support of religion, liberty of thought, enlightened piety, Christian union and strong solicitude for the welfare of

1. L.F. Morland - "The New Social Outlook.p.15

2. J.L. & B. Hammond "Town Labourer, 1760-1832." Quoted in "The New Social Outlook - L.F. Morland.p.16. (Swarthmore Lecture for 1921.)

I

the masses in humble life." The New Connexion was one of several splits which occurred in the Methodist organisation after the death of Wesley. Practically all these splits were concerned with the attempts to introduce modifications into the original plan of control. By a Deed of Declaration in the Court of Chancery on Feb. 28th, 1784, Wesley passed on oversight at his death to a Conference of "one hundred ministers" and control in their hands was defined in terms of an exact science. The 'legal hundred' meant that laymen were condemned to play only the most minor roles in the governance of the Church. It is interesting to discover that the great agitations within the Wesleyan Church occurred at the moments of greatest political agitation on the Continent of Europe. In 1795 - the period of the French Revolution, and of the first realisation of the deep stratum of bitterness which underlay the social life of Europe, Alexander Kilham broke away and started the 'New Connexion'.² The years leading up to the Reform Act of 1832 witnessed the Leeds Organ Case (1828), while almost immediately afterwards occurred the expulsion of J.R. Stephens (1834). Around the year 1848 is grouped the

I. Booklet of the 'Jubilee of the Methodist New Connexion.p.384
 2. The bone of contention was the question of lay representation which in one form or another has been one of the most controversial issues of Methodist policy throughout the greater part of its history. The New Connexion was officially organised in 1797.

story of revolutions in many European countries and it was about the same time (actually 1849) that Griffith, Emmett, and Dunn led nearly 100,000 members from the parent body to form the Wesleyan Reform Church. They did so because, under Bunting and his colleagues, what remained of free speech in the Conference was being abolished, and such tyranny was surely out of tune with the spirit of the age,

But the mantle of democracy, as far as the Wesleyan offshoots were concerned, belongs most fittingly to the Primitive Methodists. The story of the split has a place here, for it provides signal evidence of how the inheritors of John Wesley's name and spirit had come to fear anything in the nature of an innovation, for on this occasion they opposed something their founder would heartily have approved. The separation of the Primitive Methodists was not caused by any demand for lay representation, but by certain acts of intolerance disloyal to the history and traditions of Methodism. The passion for winning men and women for Christ which drove the Wesleys and George Whitefield out into the highways and hedges inspired two humble laymen, William Clowes and Hugh Bourne, to organise great open-air preaching services and prayer meetings modelled on what the American Methodists called 'Camp Meetings'. A campaign so novel, organised by the laity, alarmed the timid leaders at headquarters, who feared lest the Government should attack

political significance to such gatherings. A formal censure was promulgated, but so obstinate were the leaders of the campaign that in July 1811 the first general meeting of Methodist Societies known as "Primitive Methodism" was held.

This new group was far more democratic even than the New Connexion and its spread over England is a story of the remarkable heroism of simple men. ^I It owed nothing to any commanding personality, but was created by the unceasing loyalty of a company of very humble and ordinary people. In all parts of the Kingdom they met the most abominable treatment, but these plain, earnest men survived the opprobrium, to build a Church which, alone of the Methodist Sects, increased its membership by leaps and bounds during the Chartist years, and, by providing a living alternative, prevented the Chartist Churches hardening into another sect. These simple preachers were almost alone in caring for the souls of the inhabitants of remote villages and the inhabitants of the vilest parts of the great sprawling industrial towns of the North. What Lancashire, during these turbulent years, owed to these plain, blunt, homely, self-educated evangelists of Primitive Methodism can be seen in the scores of chapels

which were then erected. More than anybody else, these products of the working-class, speaking to the working-class, saved the Chartist Movement from the excesses of revolution and from the counter-tyranny which such excesses appear inevitably to provoke.

Another offshoot, the Bible Christians (or the Bryanites) became noted for their tolerance to working-class movements. One minister, James Scholefield, of Manchester, became actively associated with the Chartist movement. He was elected to the chair at a meeting of the Anti-Corn Law League in Manchester in 1841, by Chartists intent on breaking up the meeting.¹ In 1843 a conference of Chartists, representative of factory-operatives in Lancashire, was held in his chapel, indicating that the minister's support of the movement had behind it the sympathy of a goodly number of his people. Moreover, his sympathy was fully known to the authorities, for he was among those tried at the Lancaster Assizes for sedition in March 1843,² and found to be "not guilty".

It is quite clear that in their abhorrence of popular government, the leaders of Wesleyan Methodism were following the spirit of their founder. Dr. Bready is quite frank about this and seeks to justify it....."it would appear

1. March 19th 1841.

2. Gamage- History of the Chartist Movement. p.232, 235, 427.

that the Hammonds' underlying objection to this new religion is that it did not overthrow the selfishness of one social class and enthrone that of another as yet untutored class." ^I Undoubtedly Wesley stood for the 'status quo', and taught subjection to the powers that be. But is it accurate, because of this authoritarian strain, and of the fact that John Wesley never became an active social reformer, to dismiss him as, in fact, having no influence on the great social changes accomplished after Chartist times with gradual continuity? Is it not a truer reading of history to find in the Evangelical Revival an essential forerunner of the social revolution in the nineteenth century? ² This Revival, with its insistence on love of humanity, prevented class hatred expressing itself in brutal excesses during Chartist days. Wesley taught his followers resignation, but, in linking them together, he did much to stimulate the birth of the Trade-Union Movement. "The Methodist Society", by its inspiration, its foresight, its Sunday and week-day schools, its class and band meetings, its lay and street preaching, its financial organisation, its co-operation, its genius for fellowship.....laid the foundation of self-government,

I. Bready - Ibid. p. 324.

2References by Wesley (a) Thoughts on Liberty - Works Vol XI. pp. 34-36. (b) Free Thoughts on Public Affairs, Vol. XI. pp. 14-34. (c) Thoughts concerning the Origin of Power Vol. XI. pp. 46-55.

self-discipline, and self-help on which the Trade Union organisation was largely built." ^I New moral character, was without doubt a primary need of the new industrial age and this the "new religion" proceeded to build.

This new type of character is the keynote to Wesley's influence. To him religion was the "be-all and end-all" of human life. By the reformation of mankind, he meant always the reformation of the soul, and to him all economic problems were primarily religious and ethical. He was no theorist, but, in spite of his slavish regard for the instruments of Government, he did love ordinary people. There is evidence that he longed for a time to come when men would have living wages and fairer prices and continuous employment, though he did not relate social defects to the type of government then prevailing. No one disliked mob action more than he: yet in his Journal in 1758, he records with obvious admiration a high-handed method used by working-men to achieve economic justice. 'The mob', he writes, 'had been in motion all the day, but their business was only with the fore-stallers of the market, who had bought up all the corn far and near to starve the poor, and loaded ^{it} in Dutch ships which lay at the quay; but the mob brought it all out into the market and sold it for the owners at the common price. And this they did with all the calmness and composure imag-

inable and without striking or hurting anyone." ¹ Or again, we have a record of his preaching in Truro in August 1789, when he was in his eighty-seventh year and had his meeting wrecked by "numberless tinnors parading for higher wages." But his Journal entry is unexpected, for he describes the interruption as due to a "huge multitude," who "being nearly starved were come to beg or demand an increase in their wages, without which they could not live." ² His sense of Christian justice was easily roused by odd cases of suffering and to him Charity was a basic law of his faith. It is not enough to dismiss Wesley as a hide-bound Tory in politics; that is true but it is not the whole truth. It is equally accurate to say that taking into account the day in which he lived, he was a Christian humanitarian.

Shaftesbury was a signal example of the type of Christian reformer Wesley's humanitarianism produced, for though this great leader of the Factory Crusade was an Anglican, he belonged to the Evangelicals and owed much to the founder of Methodism. A great majority of his colleagues in the Factory Reform Movement, were as much the offspring of Wesley's fervour as ^{he} himself. His famous associate Richard Oastler was the son of a local preacher, and on Wes-

1. Journal - Curnyck Standard Edition. Vol Iv. p. 268.
 2. Journal - Aug. 18th. 1789.

ley's last visit to the Oastler house, he had taken the infant Richard in his arms and 'blessed him' - a fact of which Oastler was always proud. He willingly confessed that it was the Christian faith that sustained him during the long and often disappointing years of the struggle for the Ten Hours Bill. ^I Philip Grant, the capable editor of the "Ten Hours Advocate", was a fervent Bible Christian, while, in his youth, John Fielden owed a tremendous debt to the Evangelical Revival.

Shaftesbury and his colleagues, however, reveal not merely Wesley's religious fervour, but also his unwillingness to tamper with the constitutional structure. Under their leadership it came to be recognised as the accepted standard, that the struggle, whatever obstacles it encountered, or whatever the length of time it occupied, should be conducted without violence of speech or action. They made it quite clear that strikes, lock-outs, mob tactics, intimidation and threats were to be avoided. They constantly laid emphasis on the Christian character of their aim, and thought of it as having relationship merely with justice and common humanity, and never as having deep roots in the system of government. They were always confident of final victory, since they equated their own sense of

? I. Benjamin Kydd (Alfred) - History of the Factory System
Vol. I. p. 94 ff.

justice with that of the Almighty. They sought to permeate even the humblest members of their movement with this religious spirit, and, strange to relate, appear to have had a signal success in 1847, the year before the final flare-up of Chartism. Shortly after the passing of the comprehensive Factory Act in 1847 a great national conference of factory-workers' delegates met in London and sent out this unanimous resolution - "We are deeply grateful to Almighty God for the success which has hitherto attended our efforts, and now that the object of our labours for the last thirty years is about to be brought to a happy consummation, we pledge ourselves to promote by every means in our power these religious and social blessings which it was the object of the Bill to extend to the factory workers."

The operative words in this resolution are, "religious and social blessings", and these reformers took up the task in the spirit of spiritual pioneers, and seldom in that of politicians. Yet it is wise to ask if their success would have been achieved, even by 1847, if the authorities had not been conscious of the politically-minded Chartist leaders who were working towards dynamic constitutional changes.

I. Quoted in the Halifax Guardian - May 22nd. 1847.

It is far from easy to give a balanced and accurate picture of the influence of Methodism on political and social life. Probably the most sober and impartial judgement is that given by Halévy. He attributes to Methodism the fact that social changes in England have been accomplished with a marked and gradual continuity.^I Unlike other critics he accepts the view that the Evangelicals never claimed that an experience of conversion was likely to turn men overnight into brilliant political economists or sociologists of tremendous vision.

From the standpoint of 1947 it is easy to write of "the naiveté of Wesley's economic ideas and the remedies proposed",² and to forget that he and his followers were born into an economic system, which they did not make, nor regard as the first call on their time for study. Even though Wesley did say "Gain all you can; save all you can; give all you can;" it would be absurd to assume that a man of his mental stature really regarded the fulfilment of these injunctions as a panacea for all the ills of the time. Simon the Zealot and the political reformers of Christ's day were confused by the Master's apparent lack of interest in the

1. Élie Halévy - A History of the English People in 1815 Vol. I. p. 335.

2. G.C. Cell - The Rediscovery of John Wesley. p. 373 ff.

framework of society, but many of them came to understand.
Many great reformers of Wesley's time ~~a~~nd of the Char-
tist era failed to see that Evangelical^{el} religion could accom- X
plish anything, only now can we begin to assess clearly how
much our modern society owes to the influence of Methodism.

Chapter VIII

Joseph Rayner Stephens
Chartist and Preacher

CHAPTER VIII

Joseph Rayner Stephens - Chartist and Preacher

By far the most outstanding religious leader to associate himself with the Chartist movement was Joseph Rayner Stephens. It would be difficult to give an accurate picture of Chartism in Lancashire and ignore him; it would be impossible to write of the relationship of the Churches to the movement and do so. Yet no first-class biographer has ever taken him as a subject, and the only full length life-story we possess is a ragged and badly-written book by G.J. Holyoake. This is nothing more than a much expanded funeral oration, and, historically, is almost worthless. It is a tribute, but an unworthy one, for it makes no attempt to estimate the influence of Stephens on the religious and social life of his time. Like all biographies which ignore the "warts", it represents a quite unreal portrait of an unreal person.

Probably many would-be biographers have been deterred by the scanty records which are available as a starting-point. The middle and upper class newspaper owners seldom quoted his speeches in their columns, and he appears to have made very little effort himself to put his ideas into permanent form. Some of his most famous sermons exist

only in fragmentary extracts, which, torn from their context, may be, at times, quite misleading. Even more surprising is the fact that none of his contemporaries appears to have had the foresight to give any comprehensive account of his work, and Gammage dismisses him in a brief paragraph or two.¹ Even here Gammage is more concerned to show the antipathy of the Wesleyans to the movement than to pay any tribute to Stephens. "This gentleman had been a minister in the Wesleyan Connexion, and was one of their most eloquent preachers.. The slavery of this order is a well-known fact... if there is any body of men who are in the service and uphold the principle, of despotism, that body is the Wesleyan Conference.... Had he never interfered but on the side of the wealthy, he could never have given offence to that solemn² hypocritical conclave." All that can be done is to give a general outline and estimate of his life drawn from such sources as are available.

Joseph Rayner Stephens was brought up in an atmosphere of rigid Methodism, having been born in Edinburgh on May 8th, 1805, to the resident Methodist minister in the city, John Stephens. In the years after Joseph's birth his father

1. Gammage - Ibid p. 55 ff.

2 Gammage - Ibid p. 55.

occupied many high offices in the denomination, being President of the Conference in 1827, and so young Stephens grew up on terms of familiarity with the "Legal Hundred".

His father's calling as a Methodist minister took him to different districts, and Joseph came to know and comprehend the life of the country and the people as a whole. For a time he attended Manchester Grammar School, where he showed a marked aptitude for languages. At the end of his school-days, he decided to follow the family tradition and become a Wesleyan preacher. He duly entered the "Training Seminary" at Woodhouse Grove, near Leeds, and at the Bristol Conference in July 1825, at the age of twenty, he was received as a preacher-on-trial.^I Conference directed him to Beverley, in the district of Hull, where he worked under the direction of a well-known minister, Richard Treffry. During his school and college days he revealed real dramatic talent, a gift he was to exploit with great effect during the years of his public service.

Seldom have fortuitous events so prepared a man for a role he was destined to play in a great movement, for in 1829 he was appointed to the mission station at Stockholm,² where he remained until 1829. These years played a decisive

I. Minutes of Conference. Vol. Vi. pp.4,26

2. Minutes of Conference Vol. Vi. pp. 137, 246, 366 & 477

part in shaping his career and as well as in that of his brother George (later the famous Professor George Stephens, for many years on the staff of Copenhagen University). Here he found time to study the literature of a people, and to compare life in his own country with life in another. In his ministerial work he met with considerable success, and learning to preach in Swedish, gathered together a congregation of Swedes, as well as ministering to the English Methodists in Stockholm. In the early months of his stay he was fortunate enough to gain the friendship of Lord Blomfield, the British minister plenipotentiary, and in course of time became his Chaplain, surely a remarkable achievement for an unordained Wesleyan preacher. Letters quoted by Holyoake reveal the terms of intimacy which existed between the two men, and this friendship probably did much to develop a Toryism in Stephens which not even his^I Chartist association could destroy. Furthermore Blomfield obviously admired the courage which took the young man as far north as Lapland in his missionary en-^{deavours}

Holyoake quotes one letter indicative of a friendship even more important in moulding his attitude to the burning² social problems of the hour. It is a letter signed by

I. Holyoake - Life of Joseph Raynor Stephens. p. 31 ff.
 2. Holyoake - Ibid. p. 38-39.

C.F. de Montalambert, whose life ran parallel to that of Stephens in some important matters.^I At the time of his letter, Montalambert was just nineteen years of age, and since this is dated July 26th, 1829, it is roughly a year before his decision to unite himself with Lamennais in Paris, where they were jointly founders of a movement styled "L'Avenir", which attempted to introduce the spirit of democracy into Catholicism. Montalambert was a foremost advocate of the principle of the separation of the Church from the State, and vigorously expressed his sympathy for the depressed peasantry of Poland and Ireland, both of them Roman Catholic countries. Like Stephens, though he was in violent opposition to the social policy of his Church, he never wavered in his Christian faith. Both were motivated by the common aims of proving that the Christian faith required practical expression in the social structure of a nation, and that religion had a deep and real interest in the material welfare of all people. In 1829 Stephens returned to England and, at the Sheffield Conference, was² ordained into the full ministry of his Church. A few months later he was appointed to serve in the Cheltenham circuit. Little appears to be known of his work during

I. Charles Forbes Rene de Montalambert - French historian - Roman Catholic but Liberal leader.

2. Minutes of Conference. p. 446.

this period apart from the information which can be gleaned from two short letters which he sent to his father. In the second of these letters, however, he indicates that he had made the acquaintance of an M.P. named Hindley who had, in fact, "franked" the letter for him. This particular M.P. became well-known for his Factory Reform agitation, and it is more than likely that the young minister inspired his enthusiasm. By 1833 we find that he had been moved to Lancashire, and was becoming a familiar figure on the platforms of meetings held to support two movements which the Wesleyan Conference had scorned -
 I
 Factory Reform and Church Disestablishment.

The leaders of the Methodist Church did not publicly seek to impose discipline upon Stephens for his advocacy of fairer treatment to factory-operatives; rather they concentrated on his speeches directed to the separation of Church and State, a policy quite contrary to Wesleyan tradition. He was suspended temporarily, and at the subsequent "Conference" a Committee of ministers was appointed to have conversations with him upon the matter, and to seek to persuade him from openly supporting the policy of Church Disestablishment. He at once refused to give any undertaking to allow his own conscience to be

superseded by the law of his Church, and in 1834 his resignation was asked for and accepted.^I These proceedings were accompanied by violent articles in the columns of the "Chartist Advocate", of which his brother John was editor, and brought to a climax in an open letter addressed by the newspaper to J.R. Stephens.² One paragraph of this letter conveys a sense of the whole setting in which the battle was waged.....

"You will have noticed that every opportunity is seized by Jabez² and his minions for making demonstrations in favour of the Church.....Those who are sometimes admitted into the secrets of this party, talk confidentially about Methodism being made an appendage to the Church."

These sentences indicate the basis on which the whole charge against him was formulated - the whole of the resolutions concerning the matter forming an important item of policy in the Conference Minutes of 1833. He was specifically accused^{of} attending four public meetings held at Ashton-under-Lyne, Hyde and Oldham, and conveying to the audiences as a Methodist minister his desire for a separation of Church and State. The indictment went on to accuse him of using his pulpit as a platform for persuading people to sign a petition for the achievement of such an object, and as having

1. Minutes of Conference. Vol. Vii. p. 417

2. Holyoake - Ibid pp. 48-9.

3. A reference to Jabez Bunting - the authoritarian leader of the Wesleyan Conference.

Accepted an appointment to the office of Corresponding secretary to a society with the title of "The Church Separation Society for Ashton-under-Lyne and the Neighbouring District."

The first part of the "Resolution" passed by the Conference tells us much of the attitude and temper of the Wesleyan Church. This declared that, "In these proceedings, Brother Stephens has flagrantly violated the peaceable and anti-sectarian spirit of Wesleyan Methodism so strongly enjoined in the writings of our founder, enforced by repeated acts of the Conference since his decease, and required as a necessary qualification of every Methodist preacher, particularly in that epitome of his pastoral duties, contained in the minutes of 1820, and directed by a standing order of the Conference, to be read in every annual district meeting, as solemnly binding on every minister of our Connection." ^I

Eight additional resolutions amplified and justified the stand taken in these words. This is a truly remarkable document, for it appeared at a time when every form of contempt of which the Anglican Church could avail itself was poured upon the Wesleyan for their "sectarian" doctrine, vulgarity in piety, and personal ignorance. Yet

these same Wesleyan ministers boasted of their own anti-sectarian spirit and of their attitude of respect ~~to~~ ^{towards} the Established Church, which had ridiculed them in practically every parish in the country. It is the purpose of any real Church to produce men of high courage, of real humility and of generous impulse, and Wesleyanism produced such men. But it is doubtful if in the whole history of denominationalism it is possible to find so glaring an example of abjectness of spirit as that shown by the "Legal Hundred" towards the Church of England in the "Age of Reform."

But the Wesleyan Church could not so easily solve her problems. It was one thing to separate Stephens from the Connection; it was a much more difficult thing to separate him from his congregation. Helped by friends, he established an independent chapel in Ashton-under-Lyne, in the heart of the South Lancashire spinning area, and collected the great majority of his Methodist flock around him. Almost at once two things happened which brought his congregation solidly behind him in his new type of ministry. The Owenite version of the "Grand Trade Union" was ruthlessly crushed; and the New Poor Law was put on the Statute Book. In his congregation were many bitter people. Some had been disappointed by the unexpected manner in which the Reform Act^{of} 1832 tended to transfer power into the hands of the commercial classes

and others had been angered by the failure of the Factory Act of 1833 to alleviate the distress of the working-man.

Almost at the same time Richard Oastler began his historic campaign in the "Leeds Mercury" for a more effective measure of factory reform, and Stephens at once joined hands with his contemporary in Yorkshire. He threw himself whole-heartedly into the agitation for a ten-hour day, and became well-known as a provocative speaker on the "Short time Committees." In the few months which had passed since his expulsion from the Wesleyan ministry, he had built up seven preaching houses, but he lost much of this spiritual support by his fierce agitation for factory reform. His father records, "A letter from Joseph; lost five out of seven preaching-houses by the part he has taken in the Factory Question. Had he served the God of Israel instead of the calves of Jeroboam he would not have been so soon forsaken." I In this note his father reveals the exclusive spirituality of the average Wesleyan minister of the period. His son's concern for liberty and for the bettering of conditions for the workers struck him as being opposed to the real task of the ministry.

It was a strange social background against which to

cultivate a religion of pure "spirituality", for every Wesleyan preacher in the North of England must have been aware of the utterly impossible conditions under which the factory operatives lived and worked. Stephens was driven by the discipline of his Church to seek his congregations in the open-air in many Lancashire towns, and his teaching of Christian principles within the framework of a humanitarian philosophy made a great appeal to the oppressed peoples. His revolutionary ideas made him unwelcome to the Methodist Church, but it is doubtful if the more cautious of the leaders of the Factory Reform Movement agreed with more than a modicum of his ideas. These latter, however, soon found themselves unable to do without him, so completely had he won the confidence of the Lancashire workers. This confidence sprang from the fact that he identified their cause with the work of Almighty God, declaring that the Almighty hated the slavery of the factory and approved of man's rebellion against it.

Stephens always remained intensely conscious of his vocation as a Christian minister, and vigorously defended his position as a political advocate. During the last week of December 1837, he delivered an address in Manchester, in which he was at great pains to explain his

presence on the platform of a purely political party meeting. He declared that he belonged to a calling which had as its guiding principle, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," and that his life's purpose was to bring the laws of heaven into direct relation with those of earth. But perhaps his most scathing indictment of the minister who divorced his vocation from the everyday problems of the community was delivered in London in May 1839. "If all ministers would only preach an equal truth to the rich and the poor; if the Gospel were thus faithfully, impartially, divinely preached in England for seven days, the end of the seventh day would behold the end of social tyranny as it affects the people." G.D.H. Cole reminds us that he accused all types of ministers of joining in league against the people rather than faithfully discharging their duty and preserving factory workers from the inhuman treatment of their employers.

When, late in 1836, the Poor Law Commissioners decided to apply the new Poor Law to Lancashire, Stephens was already a power in the land. Up to this time in the Industrial North the Poor Law had operated as an elementary system of unemployment relief, a fund on which the worker

1. Report of Speech - Northern Star Dec, 30th, 1837.

2. Sermon - "Shepherd and Shepherdess Fields" London May 12th 1839

could depend in a time of industrial depression. The Commissioners chose to turn their attention to Lancashire during a period of very uncertain and irregular employment in the cotton-trade. In a period of prosperity, the introduction of new regulations might have created little disturbance, but to have it sprung on them when conditions were already well-high intolerable, engendered a mood of revolt among the workers. They were ready to give ear to anyone who could express their own passionate sense of injustice, and especially to follow a leader like Stephens, who had already won their confidence in one fight.

To his denunciation of the Malthusian population theory and the Benthamite principle, on which the new Law was based, Stephens once more brought his powerful armoury of Biblical allusion. He proceeded to show that hunger and poverty were not due to surplus population, but to selfish government and the spread of a commercial spirit which ignored the fundamental rights of ordinary men and women. In one rousing sermon he raised his audience to a high pitch of enthusiasm when he declared, "I tell you that if they attempt to carry into effect this damnable law, I mean to fight. I will lay aside the black coat for the red, and with the Bible in one hand and a sword in the other - a sword of steel, not of argument - I will fight to the death, sooner than that law shall be brought into operation on me or on

others with my consent or through my silence." ^I His speeches in support of the Anti-Poor-Law agitators reveal his prophetic and revolutionary oratory at its best. In February, 1838, he spoke in Manchester of the New Poor Law as the "Law of Devils", and reiterated his determination never to submit to its operation. "Once more then, I register before Heaven and record before you, my determination never in any way, in any shape, or at any time, to obey that law. The moment that law is declared to be in operation in Ashton, that moment my office, as the peoples' leader and guide is at an end." ² There could be no doubt of his sincerity in this campaign or of his determination to do all that was within his power to have the law erased from the Statute Book. In one of his earlier addresses he went so far as to compare the provision made for the dowager Queen, and for the widows of the Commissioners, with the provision made for the dependents of a working-man. ³ In the light of his own political background this comparison was as remarkable as it must have been effective, with the type of audience before which it was delivered.

A good deal of stress has been laid on the fact that

1. Extract from a sermon preached at Primrose Hill, London on Sunday May 12th, 1839.

2 Anti-Poor Law Meeting, Carpenters' hall, Manchester, Feb. 10th., 1838.

3. Speech reported in the "Northern Star", Nov. 8th. 1837.

Stephens now and then declared himself to be a Tory, meaning by Toryism the kind of political philosophy he had developed in his Stockholm days. The clearest evidence of this Toryism lay in his tendency to think in terms of a golden age which lay in the past, rather than looking to building in the future an entirely new society in harmony with the many material revolutions of his own age...Yet, like so many of his utterances, this declaration of Tory allegiance was an exaggeration, and was his graphic way of expressing his hatred of the Whigs and those laws for which they were, in the main, responsible. To understand him at all, it is essential to realise that he never became a politician, and never related any particular^{act}/of Government to the whole of the existing situation. His bitter and not always logical denunciation of the New Poor Law was an excellent example of his failure to appreciate how deeply the social structure of the country had changed since Elizabethan days. He remained a preacher, but one who had been inspired to direct his main weight of Christian teaching to the question of the responsibility of the privileged section of society for their poorer neighbours,

The eager response which his advocacy of Factory Reform and his opposition to the Poor Law won from the workers of Lancashire, compelled the Government to take action, and on

December 27th, 1838, he was arrested. On December 29th he was released, temporarily, on bail, in the sum of £500 paid by himself, and two sureties of £250 each. On January 3rd, 1839, after a subsequent examination, bail was raised to £1.000 in his own case and £500 in each of his sureties. The fact that the money was forthcoming immediately is clear evidence that he had powerful friends behind him. "The agitation caused by his apprehension was very remarkable. The whole body of Radicals felt it, and, in Manchester and its environs, great apprehensions were entertained of riotings and extensive mischief. All the associations held meetings....but nothing was to be feared from the assemblies of the Radicals, as it might have been reasonably expected that the leading men in these associations would prevent any of the members from attempting any improper interferences with the due course of law." ^I His trial did not open until Monday, August 15th, 1839, and was held at the Chester Assizes. During the intervening months his popularity with the workers rapidly increased. When he was introduced to the Grand Convention of the Chartist Movement in London in April, 1839, he was received with enthusiastic cheering which lasted for several minutes.

1. From Place's MSS "History of Working Men's Association." British Museum.

2. Place's MSS. Vol III.p. 98

Of the Chartist leaders, Stephens seems to have been most closely associated with Feargus O'Connor and James Bronterre O'Brien. At the Stalybridge dinner to Sharman Crawford, M.P., in January 1837, O'Connor proposed the toast of "The Rev. J. R. Stephens and the Ten-Hour Bill".¹ Again, in December 1838, we find a conference of Yorkshire Chartist delegates meeting at Liversedge, passing a vote of complete confidence in Feargus O'Connor and the Rev. J. R. Stephens. Unhappily their friendship did not survive the arrest of Stephens, for O'Connor at once disclaimed having advocated physical force, and at the same time denounced those who had preached it. Of Stephens, his biographer says, "he retracted nothing. Against hunger and personal oppression, and for the rights of domestic life, he was ready to fight, and believed God sanctioned such resistance. He better knew his mind than any other agitator among whom he was thrown. He had little sympathy with political remedies. All his politics were summed up in two principles - the justice of God and the comfort of the common people."²

The defence speech delivered by Stephens at his trial

1. Northern Star, January 13th 1837.
 2. Holyoake - Ibid pp. 143-146.

is remarkable for its stirring denunciation of liberalism, and reveals how far he was from conceiving his mission to do for England what the revolutionaries had done for France. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, he sought to warn the leaders of the community of the dread retribution their indifference to the condition of the poor would bring in its train. He did not desire to re-arrange the whole order of society. Thus, in the trial speech:-

"For years I have lifted up my voice against the folly of these Liberal notions. I have embraced every opportunity of showing to the people that the principles of what is now called liberalism and reform, are the most dangerous principles that can be entertained by any. I have shown the people that, instead of removing institutions, they ought to amend them, that instead of asking for anything new they ought rather to go back and look to what the wisdom of their forefathers so carefully, and I will add, my Lord, religiously, laid down as the foundation of civil and political liberty." I In the remainder of his defence he goes on to declare that he has only exhorted men to observe the immutable principles of truth and charity defined in the Christian Scriptures. Indeed, because such principles are found in the Bible, he holds that they have a decisive place in the British Constitution.

I. Holyoake - Life of Stephens pp. 158-9. This account is taken from F.B. Templeton's notes in "The Northern Star".

One of the most interesting lines developed in his defence was that his conduct, even his incitement of the populace, was precisely that used by the promoters of the Reform Bill of 1832, yet the Attorney-General had not then taken legal steps to stop them. Similarly he makes a reference to O'Connell's campaign throughout the country to secure the independence of Ireland, being conducted without interference. "Yet", he declares, "no sooner does a poor undefended minister of the Gospel of peace to man, without talent, save the talent of telling the truth fearlessly.....a man without influence, save the influence of the widow's prayer and the power of truth, which is great and will prevail; no sooner does a man situate and charactered, as I am, step forward to plead the poor man's right - to speak on behalf of the widow and the fatherless, to express constitutionally his opinion of the Poor Law Amendment Act and the factory system - then the Attorney-General comes down to this assize at Chester and prosecutes that individual, as he tells you, simply for the purpose of 'vindicating the law'".^I It is strange, however, that a man/^{who}so clearly understood what had brought the Attorney-General to his trial, should have been unable to make other simple deductions. He was not being prosecuted for his criticism of the Poor Law Act, nor

for his revelation of factory abuses; he was being put out of circulation because his type of moral oratory threatened to unite the workers in such a way as to make them a serious menace to the status quo. Of all the Chartist leaders, he came nearest to doing that, because of his sincerity and the unselfishness of his motives. If he had succeeded in welding the diverse elements of the Lancashire operatives into one united body Chartism would, indeed, have been a danger to the established order.

The Attorney-General, Sir John Campbell, based his whole case on the fact that the "Rev. Joseph Rayner Stephens attended an unlawful meeting at Hyde on November 14th, 1838, - a meeting seditiously and tumultuously met together by torch-lights, some of the members bearing fire-arms with the intention of disturbing the public peace." The indictment charged Stephens also with speaking at the meeting. The Attorney-General described what Stephens did at this great gathering. "He (Stephens) mounted the hustings and addressed the assembled multitude. Amongst other things he told them that he had news for them; that he had been in the barracks, and that the soldiers would not act against them. Then he asked the vast assembly, 'Are you armed?' By way of an answer there was a discharge of firearms. He then said, 'I see you are ready', and he wished them good-night." I

At this great rally, carried away by his own fervour, Stephens had clearly laid himself open to arrest. He was found guilty, and received sentence of eighteen months' imprisonment in the "House of Correction", and the Attorney-General conceded him the use of pen, ink, books and paper. In addition he was bound over to keep the peace for five years in two sureties of £500 and £250 respectively. In fact he served the major part of his sentence at his own request in Chester Castle. The authorities clearly wanted to silence him, rather than to exact the penalty which, on purely political grounds, his offences merited.¹

The most valuable part of Holyoake's biography is the chapter in which he seeks to explain the Conservatism of Stephens. Especially does the value lie in this definition....

"There are two distinct classes of Conservatives, political Conservatives and social Conservatives. The political Conservatives care only for power for themselves; the social² Conservatives care only for the welfare of the people."

Holyoake described Stephens as belonging to the social Conservatives. Like their fellows of the political variety, such people respect authority, and believe in the rule of the educated and the well-to-do, but at the same time they believe that such government can be both wise and generous.

1.-Holyoake - Ibid pp. 172-3.

2. Ibid. p. 198

Here Holyoake has defined, quite unconsciously, the politics of the most humane type of Methodist, the man who had been brought up "to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's", and had never thought out the question of whether Caesar had not appropriated some of the things which rightly belong to God. What happened to Stephens seems fairly straightforward: his compassion for the poor grew to such an extent that he was compelled to choose between his Tory principle and his duty to help the people. He chose the latter. This Tory Radical doctrine was clearly expressed in the "People's Magazine" in 1841. - "It is not the transfer or the extension of power to make laws that we mainly want, but the will only to make, and only to obey such laws as are right. This is the first and the great want."

Such a definition makes only too clear the vague idealism which clouded so much of this reformer's thinking. It is therefore hardly a matter for surprise that he failed so completely as a politician as to receive only 19 votes when he stood for Parliament for Ashton-under-Lyne in 1839, his opponent polling 201 votes. Like many idealists, he had little faith in political methods, pinning his faith to direct action by the people against their oppressors, and to the change in the spiritual life and sense of values of the individual. In one of his sermons he declared, "All the

I. Letter to a Chartist as the Result of Three Years Agitation - People's Magazine, July 1841. Edited by J.R. Stephens.

laws in England could not make Hyde a bit the better, unless the people were a changed people. An Act of Parliament cannot change the hearts of the tyrants Ashton and Howard (local mill-owners.)....But God Almighty is moving the working-classes in the country, and therefore I exhort you to give yourselves to prayer. Pray God to sound the alarm from one end of the land to the other; and then, in the spirit of self-denial, and self-sacrifice and devotion, be united as the heart of one man....It is high time there was some mighty movement." ^I It is quite in line with this concept to learn that his support was given to the Charter, not because its placing on the Statute Book would make the poor happy, but because he thought it would stab the whole community to a realisation of sin, and prepare the ground for a change of men's hearts, which to him was the essential factor of all real reform. More than once he affirmed that he cared "nothing for any form of government of law unless it secured to every living being....a full, sufficient and a comfortable maintenance, according to the will and ² Commandment of God.....that is what I will die for."

Perhaps the passage which has found its way into most historical accounts of the period, is his excursion into the field of economics in Manchester in 1838. To Stephens, the

1. Sermon preached at Hyde in Cheshire on Feb. 17th 1834.

2 In sermon preached at the Shepherd and Shepheidess Fields, London. May 12th, 1839,

question of manhood suffrage was, after all, a bread-and-butter question. If any man asked him what he meant by manhood suffrage, he would tell him...."every working man in the land has the right to have a good coat and hat, a good roof over his head, a good dinner upon his table, no more work than would keep him in health, and as much wages as would keep him in plenty, and the enjoyment of life which a reasonable man could desire. ^I Is it any wonder that, in their standard account of the Trade Union Movement, the Webbs wrote of Chartism as a Movement in which the people were betrayed by the fustian of its orators and the high pretensions of ~~its~~ leaders ?

In the type of passage by Stephens, quoted above, there is further evidence of his tendency to look backwards to a golden age, an attitude characteristic of the Toryism of his age. So far as Stephens was concerned, the typical institutions of the days before the Reform Act of 1832 would serve his purpose, provided that they were presided over by men dominated by a spirit of service to a righteous cause. The old institutions, he contended, were much to be preferred to the inhuman instruments of the Whigs, which, he felt, with their new Poor Law, their Malthusian Commissioners, their money-grubbers, could bring only black misery to the land.

With Lancashire as his starting-point, Stephens carried this gospel of revolutionary Toryism all over England. In order to bring the ruling classes to a sense of guilt, a consciousness of sin, he went throughout the mining and new industrial areas, seeking by the vehemence of his language to arouse a corresponding fire in the breasts of his hearers. Stephens has, indeed, some affinity with Disraeli's "Young England Party", and with the "Oxford Movement". Dierlamm, the German student of Chartism, throws light on this subtle connection when he suggests that the real division in the Chartist ranks was not so much that between physical and moral force wings, as that between those (he cites O'Brien and O'Connor) who were forever looking backwards to a distant halcyon day for English labour, and those who, like Cooper and Lovett, thought in the context of the actual situation. The latter saw the industrial revolution as initiating an age of constant change, and felt that the only remedy was to equip a proletariat, educationally and politically, to occupy a commanding position in the new society so obviously being moulded.

When Stephens was arrested, he denied that he was a Chartist, and clearly there was some justification for his denial. Obviously he stood for some things quite unacceptable to the rank and file of the movement. To

1. Dierlamm - Die Flugschriftenliteratur der Chartistenbewegung. p.9.

the average working-man the Chartist Movement was a crusade for political justice and the vote for the masses, keys which they believed would enable them to unlock the gates of Utopia. The place given by Stephens to religion in the ordering of the State differed widely from that given to it by his associates in the movement. He could see no reason why he should be punished as a trouble-maker when he deemed himself to be a prophet in the tradition of Amos and Isaiah, calling upon the people to repent and do works worthy of repentance. His surprise at his arrest and imprisonment is somewhat naive, he might easily have remembered the results of Jeremiah's outspokenness. He felt he was but an instrument of the Divine - that of his sermons it could truly be said "Thus saith the Lord."

In his trial speech he accused the Attorney-General of refusing to bring any of his sermons as evidence for the prosecution, because such sermons - "when brought to the touchstone of truth.....when brought to the standard of 'that book' which is part and parcel of the common law of the land, it would be found that I have inculcated no doctrines and advanced no opinions, but such as are strictly constitutional and Christian." ^I His passionate declaration

that he had never had any share in the enthusiasm for what he called "the rigmarole of the Charter" is undoubtedly an over-statement,^I but it is true that such aspects of Chartism as won his sympathy, he desired more for the glory of God than for the satisfaction of men....It was this religious bias, this pastoral attitude in all his propaganda, which made him so dangerous to the Government, and which at the same time accounts for the comparative leniency of his sentence.

After August, 1839, he never actively associated himself with Chartist agitation. On his release from prison in 1840, he took over a Chapel in Ashton-under-Lyne, established by his friends, and proceeded to discharge the ordinary duties of a Christian minister. He did, in fact, take up with some vigour his denunciation of the "New Poor Law", and, in a paper he started, (Stephens' Monthly Magazine) proceeded to arouse the public conscience. In this, however, he had the support and sympathy of a large number of ministers of all denominations, and it did not bring him into intimate contact with workers' leaders who rejected his religious convictions. In his preaching in his own Chapels, and here and there in the country - we no longer find incite-

I Ibid - p. 165.

ment to revolution. Holyoake explains this by suggesting that quieter times had come, and that he was still a stormy petrel, but ^Ithere was less necessity for this kind of zeal. When we consider that he left prison at the end of 1840, and that Chartism had still seven stormy years to run, the explanation is, to ^{say}the least, unconvincing.

His detractors have called his change of attitude a mere symptom of cowardice and an unwillingness to suffer the penalties he saw facing other people, and a desire to avoid personal inconvenience. It has been said that the few months in prison broke his spirit, and the fact that he was bound over for five years to keep the peace, completed his conversion to a non-revolutionary brand of social reforming. Such a view, however, does him less than justice, and is, of course, the view of those who assumed that his social teaching was all he had gleaned from the New Testament. His Methodist background had not been in vain, and his association with revolutionaries in the Chartist movement had been, in the main, incidental to his real aim - the conversion, if not of England, of Lancashire. He was that very rare blend - the sturdy Evangelical in religion and the reformer in politics, albeit a reformer who looked backwards.

Although he lived and worked until 1879 his life is of little significance to the student of Chartism after 1840. An echo of his former days is found in the vigorous part he played in emphasising the need for enforcing the Ten Hours Bill passed in 1847, and he took an active part in promoting the Amending Acts of 1850 and 1853, which closed many loopholes. He was noted as a friend of temperance who opposed the narrowness of total abstinence, and he opposed the Sunday closing of inns as a further restriction on the few social rights enjoyed by the people. He was suspended by the Wesleyan Conference, ostensibly on the ground that he had publicly advocated the Disestablishment of the Church of England, but in later years he became a vigorous supporter of the Union of Church and State.^I

Until a really full and detailed biography has been written, much of the story of his life and the development of his convictions must remain in the realm of speculation. Until such a work appears, it is impossible to give a true estimate of his work in Chartist times between 1835 and 1840, and of his labours in the reforming Acts of the nineteenth century.

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CHAPTER IX

Chartist Christianity

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In the early 1840s a large number of Chartist Christians separated themselves from the traditional Churches and formed religious societies for the expression of their own social type of Christianity. The movement had its beginning in Scotland, but very soon groups sprang into being in a number of English towns and cities. H.V. Faulkner, in his work on "Chartism and the Churches" clearly sums up the situation which gave rise to these independent churches. "They came into being", he declares, "largely as a protest against the Tory exclusiveness of the Established Church, the narrowness of Wesleyan Methodism and the indifference of the older Dissenting bodies to the material welfare of the workers. Many people resented the influence of Churches which taught resignation to the established order, and felt that by depleting the recognised religious bodies of members they would strike a death blow at ecclesiastical tyranny and clerical domination." ^I Perhaps an even more important reason was

I. H.V. Faulkner - "Chartism and the Churches", p. 41.

the fact that by this time Chartism had become synonymous, in the minds of many respectable people, with infidelity, and Chartists often received scant courtesy in the recognised Churches.

Much of the teaching of these Chartist Churches was based on the writings of William Lovett, particularly his insistence on moral persuasion^s as the ideal way of attaining the Charter and his complete opposition to any form of violence. Soon after his arrival in London in 1821 Lovett "threw offthe theology though not the Puritanism of the Methodist environment in which he had been brought up".^I He became a follower of Robert Owen and a convert to the Owenite philosophy of humanitarianism. The Chartist Churches gave, to Christians within the movement, a religious sanction for their doctrine of 'passive resistance' to unjust laws and economic inequalities.

They were inspired by^a genuine missionary impulse which expressed¹⁸²⁴ in efforts to secure universal education. In this respect they owe much to Lovett and his little manual on education,² written in prison in the winter of 1839-40 was used in many of their study circles. There was a naive simplicity about the scheme for national

1. G.D.H. Cole - Chartist Portraits p. 35.

2. William Lovett- Chartism - a New Organisation of the People

education as outlined by Lovett. He calculated that if roughly two million Chartists^I would pay one penny per week to a central fund, schools and libraries could be brought within the reach of every child in the land. Two important details were omitted in the calculations; no provision was made for the regular payment of the teachers and no allowance made for the cost of collecting such small sums from so many people. The Chartist Churches did not concern themselves unduly with the financial side of the scheme; instead, they started to educate the children of their own members on Sundays and in the evenings.² There is no record of any Chartist Church ever having been established in Lancashire itself. This is doubtless due to the fact that Stephens had done for the county what the Chartist Churches intended to accomplish throughout the rest of the country. Yet it is difficult to write of Chartism and Christianity, in however circumscribed a geographical area, and ignore the movement which owed so much to the leadership of Arthur O'Neill, the originator of the most successful of the Chartist Churches.

I. 1,000,283 persons had signed the National Petition in 1839.
 2. M. Howell - Chartist Movement pp. 200-203.

Various writers have described this Church which was established by O'Neill in Birmingham in 1840. Soon this had become the centre of a group of Churches, though there was no official connection. Quite clearly, in a great industrial area, they met a fundamental need which was neglected in the conventional teaching of Church and Chapel. The Chartist Churches were taught and served by men who believed, as one of their best known preachers put it, that "Christianity ^hould prevail in everyday life, that commerce should be conducted on Christian principles, and not those of Mammon, and that every institution ought to be based on the doctrines of Christianity." ^I The Report of the Midland Mining Commission described O'Neill as having a tremendous effect on the lives of workers in Birmingham and in the surrounding districts. It was stated that there was a deep religious feeling in the district, that prayer-meetings and hymn-singing were common in the pits, and the Chartists had stepped in where the Churches had failed. The services were held in halls, schools, and private houses. Sermons were preached; children were baptised, and the Lord's Supper administered. The congregations

I. Report of the Midland Mining Commission. p. 608.

were largely composed of Methodists and Baptists, who found in these services the kind of Christian teaching they wanted and missed in their own Chapels.

Through the medium of his Chartist novel, "James Woodford", Henry Solly has given us a clearer picture of the character of O'Neill ".....he was an out-and-out Chartist, but he was also a firm believer in Christ and Christianity, and so he thought the two things might be united, and, finding some Baptist or Methodist workmen of the same mind with himself, they formed this Christian Chartist Society. When it was first launched, respectable folk looked at them much as you would look at a mad dog. But they worked quietly on, 'instant in season and out of season', always abounding in good works, and careful to give^{no} offence. If a neighbour or neighbour's child was ill, a 'Christian Chartist', was sure to be ready to run for the doctor, or to sit up to nurse all the night long. If help was wanted for a burial, half a dozen Christian Chartists would volunteer to carry the coffin. If a fight had to be stopped, a quarrel prevented, there were Christian Chartists^I ready to do it."

There is good reason to suppose that the members here were representative of Chartist Christians throughout the country. The Church was run on voluntary lines, and O'Neill and his colleague, John Collins, were maintained by the subscriptions of the worshippers. In actual working the members tended to form two distinct groups according to the direction in which their particular interests lay. One "Study Group" studied democratic thought as laid down in the works of Cobbett and Paine, and sought to discover means of implementing the Charter by tactics which could freely be used by Christians. The other group was mainly concerned with social problems such as temperance and education, and tried to persuade the Government of the necessity of legislation to promote these objects.

The recognised denominations were at one in their condemnation of all efforts made by the Chartists to found their own special type of Churches. In contrast to Solly's fulsome praise, a contemptuous description has been recorded by a Wesleyan Minister, : "O'Neill called himself a Christian Chartist and always began his discourse with a text, after the manner of a sermon; and some of our people went to hear him just to observe the proceedings, and were shocked beyond description.....They have a hymn-book of their own

and affect to be a denomination of Christians." ^I Other critics referred to O'Neill's organisations as "pretended Churches, dispensing pretended sacraments, on the ground of a political creed."²

The actual loss of membership, and the fear of even greater losses, played some part in this opposition, and in the case of the Anglican Church, her sense of grievance was aggravated by the extensive use of lay-preachers, a system hardly likely to strengthen her own claims of the Apostolic Succession of her priesthood. The detractors are unable to disguise the obvious success of these Chartist Churches in attracting the working-class, and their only effective reply was to declare that it was the political bias which attracted, and not the crude and popular methods of worship.³ This opposition was not lessened when the Chartist Christians declared that the very fact of the Church being split up into such a variety of denomination was in itself a signal proof of its Godlessness. Furthermore, O'Neill's constant resistance to any method which had any kinship with violence made it difficult to substantiate

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1. Parliamentary Papers. 1843 XIII. p. CXXXII.
 2. Chartist Circular - Aug. 1840
 3. English Review Vol. I. P. 70

a claim that the Chartist Christians were dangerous revolutionaries.¹ The Bible never became, in the hands of O'Neill, the explosive force which J.R. Stephens made of it.

In regard to the Chartist Churches, it is fair comment to say that their specific purpose was to relate the radical programme of the Charter to their Christian faith. They wished to establish the fact that they were Chartists, because first of all they were Christians. Their hymns and sermons and acts of worship were a blend of Christian praise and social aspiration, though there is some evidence that on occasion² the service was merely the excuse for a purely political lecture. It is interesting to find an echo of such application in the records of the great American preacher, Henry Ward Beecher, who exercised his main ministry in this period. "A Christianity which will not help those who are struggling from the bottom to the top of society needs another Christ to die for it."³

The radical change which occurred in a minister's attitude to his vocation once he had been converted to has been summarised for us by the Rev. Joseph Barker Chartism, in a record of his own personal experience.

"Formerly I thought it was wrong for a Christian to meddle in political matters. Formerly I thought it was the duty

1. Parliamentary Paper 1843.

2. Solly - These eighty years (London 1893) Vol. I.p.385.

3. Life Thoughts of Henry Ward Beecher - Edna Dean Proctor (1858- p.33)

of Christians to unite themselves in Churches..to confine their labours to the government of their little kingdoms...I now think differently. I have no faith in Church organisations. I believe it my duty.....to aim at the annihilation of all corrupt institutions." ^I

An excellent example of Chartist belief is found in the theological arguments by which such Christians buttressed the idea of "Universal Suffrage". They regarded the attempt to attain this goal as a direct instruction from God, since from the Christian doctrine that all men are equal in the sight of God, they drew the inference that all men are equally fitted to determine and shape the government of a country. On one of their banners was emblazoned the slogan "Every man is born free. God has given all men equal rights and equal liberties." ² The strong resemblance of this motto to the "First Article of the American Constitution", is indicative of their common source. It was difficult, however, for the Chartist Christians to put this belief into practice, since, on the whole, they were equal in their poverty.

While it was doubtless true that the Chartist Churches attracted a good proportion of their membership from the regular denominations, they had before them a great field for missionary enterprise among the masses who attended

1. Reformers' Almanack p. 284.

2. Dolleaus - "Le Chartisme" II. p. 466.

no Church at all. One of the leaders of the High Church Movement, Mozley, estimated that practically all of the factory operatives were outside the influence of the Church of England, and that, indeed, only one in ten attended any place of worship at all. ^I. There seems reasonable ground for assuming that O'Neill and his followers were mainly concerned to bring the great non-churchgoing masses within the influence of Christian teaching. Added to this, they had found the great denominations to be obstructive in their attitude to social reforms, and felt that the time had come to create a Church more in line with the aspirations of the people.

This aim to establish a Church directly concerned with the problems of men in the community had its justification in the remoteness of some of the best of the Evangelicals. In his diary for 1840 (July 4th) "Lord Ashley" records that in his agitation for the emancipation of chimney sweeps' apprentices, he had not been able to rely on religious folk. "I find that Evangelical^{el} religionists are not those on whom I can rely. The Factory Question and every question for what is called 'humanity' receive as much support from the 'men of the world', as

from the men who say they will have nothing to do with it." ^I
 Or again we find the same reformer recording (in his diary for Jan. 5th, 1841) in even stronger terms this indifference of Christian folk. He is speaking of the help he has received from the Churches in his campaign for Factory Reform. - "To whom should I have naturally looked for the chief aid? Why, undoubtedly, to the clergy and especially those of the trading districts. Quite the reverse; from them I have received no support or next to none; one or two in their individual capacity have given me encouragement and wished me God-speed; but as a body, or even numerically, though singly, they have done, are doing, and will do, nothing....." ² If so loyal and convinced a Churchman as Ashley could write in these terms, could feel stirring within him loathing and disgust at the attitude of organised religion in the manufacturing areas, is it any wonder that new Churches to meet the needs of a new day arose?

In an article printed in the Quarterly Review of December 1840, Ashley had amplified in some logical detail these very points. He was, and remained, a Tory - but he blamed the blindness of the Church for the persistence of

1. Edwin Hodder - "The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury K.G." (ed. 1887) p. 161.
 2. Ibid. p. 175.

an obvious antagonism between Capital and Labour. Capitalists he saw as soulless machines, caring nothing for sickness or accidents caused to workers, but existing only to make profit. Instead of leaving these multitudes to the ministrations of infidels and socialists, he pleads that the treasury be opened for the building of Churches, and for the sending throughout the land of ministers determined to reverse this standard of conduct. Like O'Neill, he felt that the task of religion was to teach co-operation among the classes, to act as a bulwark against tyranny and oppression, and not merely to maintain its own life.

There is one point worth noting here, a point of much greater importance than a cursory examination would suggest. The Chartist Churches were in a very real sense a revolt against the ascetic tendencies engendered by the Methodist Revival. A moral revolt nearly always answers extravagance with extravagance. The Methodist revolt had real kinship with Puritanism in this respect. It was a revolt against a dissolute way of life and it preached a stern asceticism. The business of Methodist preachers was not to teach a new theology (there Wesley differed from Luther and Calvin), for Wesley declared specifically, "In matters of religion I am for as few innovations¹ as possible". Rather it was to bring ardour and

1. Wesley - Works Vol. VII, p. 512.

purpose into a Church whose teaching had become formal and old, and whose life and conduct reflected too slavishly the spirit and standards of the world. They were not rebels against the authority of this comfortable and indolent institution; they were rebels against the easy-going pagan life of the time with its neglect of the passionate gospel of personal salvation, which, in Wesley's view, the Christian Church came into being to preach.

The Hammonds compare the early Methodist preachers with the Franciscans,^I and this description is apt in some respects. These preachers practised an austere simplicity of life; and sought to set a new tone in public conduct. This was on the direct injunction of Wesley. "Your strictness of life, taking the whole of it together, may likewise be accounted new: I mean your making it a rule to abstain from fashionable diversions, from reading plays, romances or books of humour, from singing ancient songs or talking in a gay diverting manner."² Soon they became conspicuous in a careless age for their earnest and solemn behaviour. Not only that, but their example, in the early years of the Revival produced remarkable results among the classes

I. J.L. & B. Hammond - The Age of the Chartists (1832-54)
 2. Wesley - Works Vol.VIII, p. 351.

neglected by the Church. By their efforts great numbers of ignorant men and women were brought under the influence of Christian teaching, and a new ardour took hold of thousands of ordinary people so that to a life of rough hardship they were able to bring a heroic ideal and a spirit of high endeavour.

When the fires of Revival had died down, it was discovered that this asceticism had affected the lives of many people not prepared to accept the Methodist version of Christian living. This was no insignificant discovery, for to serve any real purpose an ascetic life must be the choice of the man who leads it. When an austere way of life is thrust on others, it deprives them of opportunities for satisfying their imagination and finding full expression of their desires.

The clearest evidence of Methodist austerity was its effect on the English Sunday. For the great majority of the workers Sunday was the only day of leisure. Whether they wished to attend a service of worship or not, they were refused all reasonable opportunities for recreation. The result was that they were driven to less reputable forms of amusement. The Lancashire papers were full of complaints that the youth of the large towns spent Sunday gambling in the streets, or in drunkenness and brutal sports, and that their behaviour constituted an offence to decent

Church-going people. ¹ Concerning Liverpool we read, "on Sundays....all the public houses are opened, and all the public walks, cemeteries and Zoological and Botanical gardens, where the people might amuse themselves innocently are closed.....the cemeteries are open to the public every day of the week except Sunday." ² Similar restrictions existed in Manchester. In a series of magazine sketches describing the life of the city in 1842, the shutting down of the Zoological Gardens on Sundays is cited as one of the worst injustices inflicted on the mass of the population. "The observance of the Sunday is rigorously enforced by Church and State. There is only one exception, the dram shops. All shops must be closed, all places of innocent amusement or instruction.. must be rigorously shut, but the folding doors of the gin palace may be open to any man who pushes his foot ³ against them." Dickens writes of the same problem rather more satirically, observing that the choice was between bringing up children to be church-goers or to ⁴ attend the beer-shops.

It cannot be denied that the Churches which imposed

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1. See Report of the Children Employment Commission 1843.
 2. Evidence of John Finch before the Committee on Drunkenness.
 3. North of England Magazine. Vol. I. pp. 109 & 200. (p.317)
 4. Letters of Dickens, Vol. I. p. 405.

these ascetic habits, did little to satisfy the imagination of the working-classes in other ways. They were surrounded by great masses of people living in misery and poverty, but the grim forbidding Chapel buildings did little to suggest a beauty and a culture which might relieve the drabness of their lives.^I For the poor, life was a harsh and bitter struggle and only a religion which could appeal to them in terms of beauty of architecture and richness of music could have caught and held the popular mind. The Methodists did indeed make one notable contribution. The two Wesleys were poets and musicians and singing became an important feature of Methodist services, although the full effect of this contribution was destroyed by the rigorous restrictions placed on the use of music. The formation of choirs for the singing of Anthems was forbidden, and the whole Methodist Church was torn apart in 1828 by a conflict over the use of an organ in Brunswick Street Chapel, Leeds. Yet Coleridge puts his finger on the vital part played by music, when he declared that it was the hearty congregational singing of English hymns which kept the humbler Methodists together.² Compensation for the starved dramatic sense of the age was often found in the type of oratory which painted in grim colours the everlasting torments of

I. R.P. Jones. Nonconformist Church Architecture. p. 31
 2. Coleridge (S.T.) Table Talk, p. 90.

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 hell. This stern and forbidding Sunday, with its sanction of hell-fire, its proclamation of a doctrine of submission, was the gift of the Churches to a people heeding, above all, things, some space in its life in which it could lose itself in noble wonder, and some places where it could truly express the spirit of fellowship and communion. A foreign observer, Frederick Von Raumer, summed it up: "The lower classes who often have to toil wearily through every other day, find Sunday.....the weariest of all. Often after serving an austere master, they are made to find in the Father of Love, an austerer still."²

Chartism was an expression of the growth and prevalence of discontent. One Radical magazine declared that the only reply made by the Churches to this challenge was "Why, if you are still discontented, do you not seek to accumulate wealth and so become respectable like ourselves?"³

But the discontent of which Chartism was a symbol was provoked by a deeper poverty than lack of money. By a rigid social system of inequality the mass of the poor were condemned to a life without leisure, and hence to a life without education or enjoyment. The workmen's newspapers

1. See Wm. Lovett - Life and Struggles Vol. I. p. 8.

2. Frederick Von Raumer - "England in 1835". Vol. II. p. 16

3. "Crisis" Magazine. June 1st. 1833.

reveal them to have been conscious of the limitation of their life; of the sharp division that was drawn between those who had the opportunity of enjoying the fine things of life and those who by accident of birth were condemned throughout the years to bear only the burdens of an industrial society. "The poor starved eye has no green spot to look upon; the weary sameness of its range is in some lathe or loom....midst dust and grease and smoke....And yet they tell us we must love our country. To love a thing we never see....."¹ The same source gives the interesting fact, that the oratorios given in the Roman Catholic Churches provided the only real opportunity given to the workers for the development of culture.²

The rise of the Chartist Churches should occasion us no surprise. The working-man was ready to be swept into any movement which captured his imagination and promised to relieve the drabness of his life. The leader who possessed a golden tongue, needed neither logic nor a constructive programme to gain a great, if transitory weight of support. These Churches represent a genuine attempt to put the troubles of the workers into the context of a religious faith.

1. "Pioneer". Dec. 7th. 1833.

2. "Pioneer" - Sept. 28th. 1833.

O'Neill was not the only well-known Chartist minister, for Henry Vincent conducted the same type of ministry in Bath. Here there was some change of emphasis, for Vincent devoted the major part of his time and oratory to the cause of Temperance. Scotland was also the scene of strong Chartist Churches, notably those in Paisley and at Partick. The Church at Paisley owed much to the labours and courageous partisanship of Patrick Brewster, one of the parish ministers of the Abbey Church. There was also one in the London district of Deptford notable for the fact that it ran a successful class in New Testament Greek.^I All of these Churches were run on the most democratic lines, making arrangements for the election by popular vote of all officers, repudiating pew-rents, and relying entirely on voluntary contributions. In addition the articles of the Paisley Church enjoined belief in the Scriptures, in Christ, and in the Atonement.

This Christian Chartist Movement does not seem to have struck very deep root, and appears to have died with the fiasco of 1848, leaving few records behind. Nevertheless it succeeded in giving many Chartists a sense of moral idealism, and when Chartism flickered out this force was not lost. It was diverted into such channels as the ^{movements} merchants

I. Chartist Movement - Hovell p. 202 ff.

for education, for public health and for temperance. Long after the last Chartist Petition had died amid the derision of Whitehall, the moral values bequeathed by Chartist Christians were helping to build up the self-respect of the English working-man. It was in this sense that Mill applied to

Chartism its greatest commendation - "the Victory of the Vanquished."^I These Chartist Christians failed as did the secular Chartists, but they blazed the trail for other movement which lifted society out of the chaos into which the new industrialisation had plunged it. They did much to make the traditional Churches more effective to combat the barbarism of the mid-nineteenth Century,

The events of the years immediately following 1848 make this clear. Through the Christian Socialist Movement, Maurice and Kingsley began to create a new social conscience in the National Church. Clergymen of all denomination began to take an active part in seeing that the Ten Hours Act was implemented in the factories. Prince Lee, the new Bishop, was pressing for a Free Library in Manchester. Among Nonconformists the failure of organised religion to meet the needs of the poorest classes had come to be recognised. The Wesleyans began to set up missions of an institutional type in the towns and cities.² A group of wealthy

I. Quoted in an article "John Stuart Mill the Reformer" by James Bonar. "Indian Journal of Economics", April 1930
 2 Hurst - History of Methodism, Vol. III. p. 1438 ff.

Manchester Methodists built a chapel in the slums of the city and maintained it for many years. In Liverpool under the leadership of J.H. Thom the Unitarians set up the Domestic Mission.

Another sign of a keener realisation of the social problem was the campaign for public libraries, and, in spite of handicaps the movement gained success after success throughout Lancashire. Warrington opened a public library in 1848, Salford in 1849, Manchester in 1852, Bolton and Liverpool in 1853, Preston and St. Helens around 1850.^I Parallel with this was a movement for the provision of public parks. During the late forties three large parks were provided in Manchester, Peel's Park (32 acres), Philip's (31 acres), and Queen's Park (30 acres). Private benefactions for public amenities became much more common in the forties and fifties, and a new tradition was created.

But the most striking and important manifestation of this new spirit was the success of the Ten Hours Bill. The Bill won its way against the weight of the prestige and power of the ablest and most experienced statesmen in public life. Peel, like Cobden, believed that to pass the Ten Hours Bill was to invite industrial disaster. But, in 1847

I. J.L. & B. Hammond - Age of the Chartists p. 343.

the House of Commons decided to take the risk which Peel painted so graphically. The step was taken to banish from English life a terrible indictment, the charge so often repeated in the mills of Lancashire, that the worker's life consisted of nothing but drinking, working and sleeping. Many respectable Churchgoers had believed for years that this formula was an essential constituent of English commercial supremacy and could be justified on that score. It was in 1844, however, that the Short Time Central Committee began to ask the vital question "Of what use are schools and libraries - if the working people have no leisure in which to study ? Parks are good only for those who can have time to perambulate them, and baths are of little use to such dirty people as do not leave work till eight o'clock at night. We protest that it is a mere burlesque to make provision for these benefits, with a continuance of twelve hours' labour, and fifteen hours' occupation for every manufacturing operative above thirteen years of age." I

If the rigorous hours of labour had been maintained, increasing provision for recreation would only have widened the gulf between rich and poor. Thus the Ten Hours Bill owed its great importance to the fact that it enabled the

I. Halifax Guardian, February 7th. 1846.

workman to share in the more generous life of the town, and, through the libraries, to gain an understanding of the national life of which he was one unit.

In his "Political Economy", J.S. Mill, writes thus - "Hitherto it is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being. They have enabled a greater population to live the same life of drudgery and imprisonment, and an increased number of manufacturers and others to make fortunes. They have increased the comforts of the middle classes. But they have not yet begun to effect these great changes in human destiny which it is in their nature and in their futurity to accomplish".^I

It was the Chartist Movement, and Chartist Christians in particular, which added to the Methodist virtues of industry, thrift, self-control and sobriety - the principle of the provision and useful employment of leisure and so brought civilising influence to bear on an Industrial Society.

CHAPTER X

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The student of Lancashire Congregationalism in the first half of the nineteenth century finds himself under a great sense of indebtedness to Dr. Benjamin Nightingale whose two narrative histories of the Churches in the period have preserved in a remarkably accurate form a complete picture of Congregational life in the county in the age of the Chartists.^I

Congregationalism in Lancashire dates from the early part of the seventeenth century. In the great Civil War of that century Bolton came to be styled the "Geneva of Lancashire" because of its unswerving support of Presbyterian and Nonconformist principles. In the history of that period, Bolton may well claim to have held a unique position because of its sufferings in the cause of civil and religious freedom. The beginnings of Congregationalism in the district after the "Great Ejection" of 1662 are indissolubly associated with the name of Thomas Briscoe.

The passing of the Five Mile Act of 1665 was of supreme and lasting importance, for it influenced the policy of the

I. Nightingale - Lancashire Nonconformity. Contenary of the Lancashire Congregational Union 1806-1906.

Churches even into the nineteenth century. The provisions of the Act were that no Nonconformist Minister or teacher should, "unless only in passing upon the road", come within five miles of any city, or town or corporate borough sending a member to Parliament, or within the same distance of any parish or place where he had formerly preached or taught, under a penalty of £40 for every offence. This compelled the Congregationalists to establish their Churches in the villages - the remoter the situation, the better.

Until the time of the Evangelical Revival there was little effective contact between the Congregational Churches scattered here and there throughout the county, the idea of independence finding ready acceptance in a time when travel was so difficult. The coincidence of the work of Wesley and Whitefield with the development of safer and speedier travel did much to change this. So far as Lancashire was concerned the leader in this period was Captain Jonathan Scott, a young soldier converted by one of Wesley's preachers. He gave up his army career and carried on an itinerant ministry in Lancashire, Cheshire, Shropshire and Derbyshire. His personal ministry began to forge links between the Churches.

I. Nightingale - pp. cit. p. 5.

On the 23rd September, 1806, in the Mosley St. Church in Manchester, the Lancashire Congregational Union came into being. It was in a very real sense a direct offspring of the Evangelical Revival. "It was part of the new order to which the old was yielding; of that silent, bloodless revolution which had made itself felt in every department of the nation's life and most of all in the religions."¹ It was intended by the founders to satisfy the passion for religious unity which so characterised Christian people in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and to act as a great missionary agency for winning the workers of Lancashire for Christ.

In the twenty years before this, three abortive attempts had been made and had prepared the way for this achievement. During the greater part of the first half of the century,² the Union found its chief centre of interest in 'the village', and it took over the work of a heroic "Itinerant Society" which since 1801 had been seeking to evangelise the rural districts. It is impossible to read the reports of the Union in the first fifty years of its existence without feeling that the towns occupied a small place in the thoughts and activities of the Assemblies compared with the villages. Richard Slate in a "Brief History of the Union", published

1. Ibid. p. 10

2. Nightingale - Cnetenary Book p. 63.

in 1840, gives a summary of the places receiving aid from the Union at that date, and practically all the forty-seven mentioned are villages or, at the best, small country towns. The following extract is typical of the whole list:-

Liverpool District

Leigh - with a congregation of 120 and the following out-stations:-

	<u>Congregation</u>
Bedford	30
Lewton	30
Barton's Factory	30
James's Buildings	30

Manchester District

Pendlebury with a congregation of 200 and the following out-stations:-

	<u>Congregation</u>
Irlams-o'-th'-Height	60
Wardley Lane	40
Folly Lane	30
Prestwick	50
Colliers Square	25

So he goes through the whole list, practically every Church mentioned having its quota of small branch stations. These names represent small hamlets and villages which very often find no place upon the ordinary map for the period.

Quite obviously the village was the natural home of traditional Lancashire Nonconformity. In the dark days when Congregationalism had been a proscribed faith, the villages had given it asylum, and it was long years before it began to establish itself in the towns. At the time of the Union, there were, of course, strong Congregational Churches in all the large urban areas, but they were, in the main, of later growth than the rural Churches. In the eighteenth century nearly all the Nonconformist interests of any note were in the villages; it was a sort of tradition, which lingered long even in the nineteenth century, that the village was Nonconformity's true home. The villages also appealed to the sympathy of Christian people because of their wretched condition. Cut off from the towns in a way which appears almost inconceivable today, lying far from the main lines of communication where a newspaper was a rarity, they became the abodes of an ignorance, a superstition, and a godlessness which were simply appalling. As a rule they did not feel the absorbing interest in the political life of the time exhibited by the town dweller and so offered a more fruitful field for missionary activity.

What was perhaps of even more importance in fixing this interest in the village, was the fact that it was not until

the 1830's and 1840's that the towns began to occupy an overwhelming influence in the economy of the country. At about this time there~~was~~ was an unprecedented increase in the population of Lancashire. In 1831 the population was computed at about 1,337,000, while in 1861, it was nearly 2,430,000.^I The influence of the great new manufacturing areas on the policy of the Union is seen in the swing of the concern of the Union to the towns in 1846. The Report at the Assembly in April of that year contains this revealing sentence, "we deem it the duty of the Congregational body to break up fresh ground and to enter upon larger schemes of Evangelisation; and we rejoice at being relieved from old engagements only that we may be at liberty for new enterprise." But even more revealing is this paragraph from the report of 1848, "A new kind of effort has been felt to be wanting and has been partially begun, that, namely, of breaking up entirely new ground, carrying the Gospel where it is not asked for, but where, nevertheless, from the extent of the population and the poverty of religious instruction, it is most urgently needed."

To meet the needs of the Chartist age, this traditional Nonconformity had to change its policy. The report of 1852 declares that the time had come to exercise a new spirit,

I. Edward (?) Baines - History of Lancashire.

and to undertake new enterprises more commensurate with the wants and character of the age. A circular issued about this time in the interests of a new organisation whose ideal was the erection of 50 new Chapels within a period of five years, refers to Lancashire as the "empire county of England, the densest hive of population, the seat of manufacture and commerce, the county whence issue so many of these mighty impulses which are changing the economical conditions of the people, and the legislation of the country and of the world itself",. Thus the Lancashire Union began to address itself seriously to the problem of the towns, and the names of churches Warrington, Radcliffe, Bacup, Fleetwood, Drylsden, Hollinwood, Middleton, Tormorden, Stretford, Accrington, Manchester, Mossley, Royton, and Liverpool, appear in the Reports as recipients of very considerable grants. Though we look in vain for any declaration of policy in regard to Chartism by Lancashire Congregationalism, clearly the agitation had shown the leaders where the deepest problems lay.

When the Lancashire Union was formed in 1806 it was an extremely simple piece of machinery. It was merely a number of ministers and churches in voluntary association for the purpose of evangelising the county and especially the rural districts. In the course of the years the machinery

became more complex, and in the Chartist age the increasing population had forged a new organisation. In the grim years of the early 1840's efforts were made to revive the system of ISOI by which evangelists were maintained in the most poverty-stricken districts. In the period 1840-1843 the chief places helped in this way were Ashton-in-Makerfield and Formby in Furness. Nightingale also asserts that Lancashire at this time was largely concerned with the construction of railways, and the "wretched condition" of the labourers engaged in that work was brought to the attention of the Union.^I For the most part, he declares, the labourers were rude and ignorant men of low and vicious habits; they were often located in numerous groups for a considerable period in remote parts of the county, far away from Church, Chapel, or school, and from the restraints imposed by the presence of civilised society; and the consequence too generally was that they sought relief from their laborious and dangerous employments, in sensual enjoyments of the lowest and most degrading kinds.² It was found to be^{Im}_A practical to employ an agent among these men, but, in 1846, two districts were selected, Darwen and Wigan, and to the Revs S.T. Porter and Wm. Roaf, the

I. Nightingale - Centenary Book. p. 91

2 Ibid pp. 91-92.

respective ministers of these places, considerable sums were granted in aid of such efforts as they might feel disposed to undertake towards "furnishing them with the Gospel of Salvation." Orrell and Upholland, New Wigan, Turton, Chapeltown and Blacknape in the Darwen district, are mentioned as places visited, where services were held, tracts and Bibles distributed and other forms of Christian effort were put forth. A flood of light is shed on the kind of work done by the report of the Missioner ~~at~~ Blacknape, a hamlet some three miles from Darwen. "I did not visit more than four houses where there~~was~~ not drinking; and at one or two I found, from the fiendish yells and horrid imprecations proceeding from them, that it would be prudent not to enter at all. This is a wretched place. It has fallen to my lot when in London to visit some of the vicious parlours and dens of the metropolis; but never did I behold such scenes of degradation, ignorance and vice as I witnessed at Blacknape." ^I

There is abundant evidence that official Congregationalism was only too well aware of the social chaos in which thousands of people were living in town and village. It is astounding to read the reports, year after year, and find no mention of the Chartist movement, which was at this

time engaging the attention of most of the workers, and with no ghost of a suggestion that the situation should be tackled by way of radical changes in Government. Each year more evangelists were despatched to the distressed areas, the implication being that conversions among the poorer classes could alone remedy the situation. Even in Nightingale's account, there is no attempt whatever to relate the misery of the cotton operatives and railway workers to the social and economic framework of the country.

The emergence of the Chartist movement found the Congregationalists engaged in a bitter struggle for the defence or extension of their religious liberties and much too concerned with their own interests to pay much attention to the revolution in society taking place around at their very Chapel doors. The Reform Bill of 1832 had greatly increased the political power of the Nonconformists, and in the excitement of the popular triumph to which they had contributed, Lancashire Congregationalists, in common with nearly all the Dissenters, began to dream of removing a host of disabilities against which they had struggled for generations. Eagerly they joined in the agitation by the National Union of Congregational Churches, established in 1831, for the removal of bishops from the

House of Lords, to abolish church rates, to redress the grievances of Dissenters in connection with marriages and burials, and to open the national universities to men of all religious creeds. Some men of bolder and more ardent temper were eager to move at once for the disestablishment of the English Church, and even the most moderate were prepared to unite with all Nonconformists in a struggle for the removal of the most irksome restrictions.^I

Thus the years of Chartist enthusiasm among the workers were years of stirring happening in the domestic life of the Dissenting Churches, and Congregationalists were far more interested in attacking Church Establishment, than the most obvious evils of the Poor Law System. It is one of the strange ironies of history that this domestic struggle was led by Edward ^aMill, a young Congregational Minister, and the only leader of note of the denomination to speak and write sympathetically of the Chartist aims.² Unwittingly he drew the interest of his fellow denominationalists in Lancashire and throughout the country, from the wider social happenings to a particular situation in which they had a personal stake. Mill was so deeply obsessed by the pernicious influence of the Establishment on the religious

I. Congregational Magazine June 18th 1833 - Vol. XVI. p. 446, also Vol. XVII., p. 378.

2. R.W. Dale - History of English Congregationalism. p. 636.

life of the nation, that in 1841 he resigned his pastorate in Leicester, and went to London, where he established a weekly newspaper for the advocacy of the principles of Religious Equality and for the demonstration of the practical evils of the Established Church. He was a rare type of leader. In his own religious life there were strong tendencies to mysticism, but he cared nothing for the religious emotion and sentiment that left men indifferent to the Sermon on the Mount. He was utterly fearless in attacking abuses, and for many years the dislike and distrust with which he was regarded by the recognised leaders of Congregationalism, were almost as intense as the hostility and rancour which he provoked among the friends of the Establishment. It is interesting to reflect what might have been the effect in the overcrowded industrial areas of Lancashire if Kialls's paper and eloquence had been attracted to the cause of social reform.

In dealing with this specific lack of social witness in the Lancashire Churches, it is essential to remember that in its origin Congregationalism is unmistakeably bourgeois. One of its roots is found in Calvinism, which is commonly regarded as the original religious inspirer of capitalist enterprise. Because of this, the services of Congregationalists in the cause of political and

religious liberty have done much to shape the destinies of two great nations - our own country and the U.S.A. For the historian it is as genuinely middle-class a product as laissez-faire itself.

But while the affiliations of Congregationalism with middle-class ideals and tendencies needs emphasis, there are differences which are fundamental. The individualism for which Congregationalism has stood throughout its history differs from that of laissez-faire. The stress is no longer alone upon individual rights, but upon individual responsibilities and upon rights only as created and conditioned by these. Such a type of religious approach was in keeping with the spirit of the middle-class and the more ambitious of the working-class during the Age of Reform, and the following table shows how quickly Congregationalism expanded in Lancashire during the first half of the century.

Statistics for 1800 - 1866 - 1906

<u>Date</u>	<u>Buildings</u>	<u>Sittings</u>	<u>Income</u>	<u>Population of Lancashire</u>	
1800	36	14,400	£238	674,000	
1866	226	114,720	£2,060	2,429,000	
1906	343	170,000	£2,800	2,500,000	I.

I. Nightingale - Centenary of the Lancashire Congregational Union p. 173

One item in the Union Reports for 1826-30 is of peculiar interest. Here we are told the Congregationalists were much concerned because permission had been granted by the Indian Government to continue the cruel custom of the "burning of Hindu widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands and the patronage afforded to idolatry by the levying of a tax on pilgrimages to idol temples, the surplus produce of which goes into the public treasury". This was the typical missionary spirit of the age, a time when wealthy manufacturers gave generous aid to the new-born missionary societies, and saw no similarity between the position of primitive peoples and their own employees.

The reports never weary in emphasising the fact that the Union had been founded to further the supreme spiritual purposes of the Kingdom of Christ. To carry the Gospel to the heathen at home, to plant Christian Churches of the Congregational order where none existed, and to encourage and assist those that were too weak to live alone, is the sort of thing with which the sender of these Annual Reports is incessantly confronted. Public Questions, so called, were sometimes put down on the agenda, but examination reveals them to be concerned only with the problems of religious liberty, which had been the special province of Congregationalists for generations. For example, at the

Annual Meeting in April 1827, Dr. Raffles of Liverpool moved, and the Rev. George Payne M.A. of Blackburn seconded, the following resolution: "That, in the opinion of this Meeting, it is desirable that the congregations in this country should stand prepared to support petitions to Parliament for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts whenever the Societies in London shall think it a suitable time to express the sense of the Protestant Dissenters throughout the kingdom on that subject." I In the following year, another resolution was moved, tendering to Lord John Russell "an expression of the admiration and gratitude with which they contemplate the enlightened, eloquent, and successful advocacy of the great principles of religious liberty, in his introduction to the House of Commons of a Bill to repeal those Acts. This resolution, forwarded to Lord John Russell, drew forth the following reply addressed to Dr. Thomas Raffles....

April 17th., 1828.

Sir,

I beg you will convey to the Ministers and delegates of the Congregational Churches in Lancashire my deep-felt thanks for the Resolution they have passed respecting the Bill for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts.

Nightingale - Op. cit. p. 113.

To have been of any service in promoting the sacred cause of Religious Liberty will always be to me a source of unmeasured gratification. Allow me likewise to express to you how much I felt the manner in which you have conveyed the Resolution. "

This letter is of real importance when we recall that Lord John Russell was one of the most *doughty* opponents of Chartism, and that though he fought for freedom in religion he was instrumental in banning all Radical Meetings for a time. Lord John's first impulse had been to allow the people to have meetings, but when the workers began to organise he fell back on the plea of the dangers of sedition. His own mood synchronised with that of Congregationalism - freedom in religion when such freedom had neither economic consequences nor disturbing effects on the existing order.

Not until 1841 do we find a small minority in the provinces under the influence of Edward Miall, moving away from this rigid Conservatism and developing that liberal outlook which was to distinguish Congregationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Yet, even in its more reactionary period, the Congregationalist zeal for evangelising the world and changing the social economy of backward peoples, was a beginning, and sowed the seeds of that

wider interpretation of its Christian mission which distinguished it in the latter part of the century. As the century advanced, Congregationists became the main support of the Liberal party, and practically every village had its Liberal Club, the chief officers, in a very great many cases, being the minister and deacons of the local Congregational Church.

Lancashire Congregationalism provides an example of the extension of Liberal ideas, in the life and work of James Philip Kay. He was born and brought up in the little village of Bamford, a few miles from Manchester. He attained considerable eminence in the medical profession and for some years was consulting physician at the Royal Infirmary, Manchester. In February 1842, he married Janet, daughter and heiress of Robert Shuttleworth of Gawthrop Hall, and in the same month he took the name and arms of Shuttleworth in addition to his own. Yet it is not as a doctor he is remembered as one of the great reformers of the nineteenth century, but as an Educationist. He was a great public servant of independent mind and enlightened ideas, of whom it has been said; "To him, more than to anyone else, we owe that England is supplied with schools for the children of her people, and that this

costly work has been accomplished without a breach between Church and State." ^I

That is of interest and importance here is that Kay Shuttleworth was brought up in the Congregational Church at Bamford, and was for a time the Sunday School Superintendent. In a letter written to be read at some special celebration of the Church in 1867, he recalls his younger days and ends with these words: "I often think of Bamford, and I should not wonder if among my last thoughts, is the Sunday School, in the organisation and management of which I, forty-five years ago, received the first impulse to observe, inquire, and ponder on the methods and discipline of schools for the people." ² It is quite impossible for anyone to surmise how much the realisation of one Chartist ideal, universal education, owed to the tiny Sunday School of this obscure Congregational Church. If Congregationalism was at one with Wesleyan Methodism in rigidly opposing or ignoring Chartist agitation, it was, at the same time, following Methodism in producing the individuals who, when Chartism had died, gave effect to Chartist aims.

Even in his days as a practising doctor, Kay Shuttle-

1. Introduction to "Life of Kay-Shuttleworth" by Sir Michael Sadler. Introduction contributed by Frank Smith.

2 Quoted By Nightingale - "Lancashire Nonconformity". p. 262

worth revealed an understanding of poor people which he had doubtless learned in his Sunday School activity. Thus he writes of the condition of the Manchester people in 1833: "The entire labouring population of Manchester is without any season of recreation, and is ignorant of all amusements, excepting that very small portion which frequents the theatre. Healthful exercise in the open air is seldom or never taken by the artisans of this town, and their health certainly suffers considerable depression from this deprivation." One reason of this state of the people is, that all scenes of interest are remote from the town, and that the walks which can be enjoyed by the poor are chiefly the turnpike roads, alternately dusty or muddy. Were parks provided, recreation would be taken with avidity, and one of the first results would be a better use of the Sunday, and a substitution of innocent amusement at all other times, for the debasing pleasures now in vogue. I need not inform you how sad is our labouring population here." ^I An incident on the day of Queen Victoria's marriage revealed the truth of this contention. A large Chartist meeting had been arranged in Manchester for the day, and the authorities feared the consequences of such a demonstration and feared,

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 even more, a rep^etion of the "Peterloo" incident. Sir C. Shaw, the Chief Commissioner of Police induced the Mayor to get the Botanical Gardens, Zoological Gardens, and any any other public parks, thrown open to the working-classes at the hour at which they were urgently invited to attend the Chartist meeting. The effect was that not more than 200 or 300 people attended the political meeting, which was a complete fiasco, and scarcely five shillings worth of damage was done in the gardens or in the public institutions by the people. A further effect produced was, that the charges before the police of drunkenness and riot, were, on that day, less than the average of cases on ordinary days." I
 Kay Shuttleworth was in no small way responsible for the opening of public parks in Lancashire in the 1850's, and again the little Church at Bamford had an incalculable effect on the life of the people.

By 1848, the year of the decisive Chartist failure, we find Congregational Churches at last becoming conscious of the social context in which they gave their witness. Algernon Wells, the Secretary of the National Union, called the attention of the County Associations to the failure of

I. See J.L. Hammond. "Age of the Chartists" pp. 119-120

all the Churches to grip the working classes, who were "Quite unconcerned spectators of our struggles for religious liberty.....not converted by Romish zeal, or any longer gathered by Wesleyan energy, or drawn by the more intellectual discourses of Independent and Baptist preachers." ^I He went on to ask why the Independent Churches attracted tradespeople, but not artisans, and spoke of their "essential middle-class character, saying that they were more exclusively middle-class than a century before. He thought that possibly the Independent conception of the Church had much to do with the neglect of the masses, for their Churches were born to strife and separation, having to witness against error in doctrine, worship, and policy, and to attack powerful vested interests. Thus they had become unpopular and greatly disliked - there~~was~~ nothing about them to attract the timid, the careless, and the self-interested. Obviously the lessons of the Demonstration of April 10th, 1848, on Kennington Common, had not been entirely ignored by Congregationalists.

This is in striking contrast to the Congregational Union's Assembly deliberations at Bristol in 1840, for the

2. Quoted by Albert Peel - These Hundred Years 1831-1932 p. 204.

report of these meetings contains this item: -

"Rev. R. Gill of Charmouth, said he wished to put ministers of their guard against an insidious practice of some socialists, who have actually sent their books as presents for Congregational libraries, which, for want of examination have actually gone into circulation before their character was detected." ^I Furthmore Josiah Conder, who was always wishing that the Churches "would not mistake selfish supineness for spirituality, and worldliness for Catholic liberality, urged that,.....

"What we want, next to more of the vital spirit from the Head, is organisation, ecclesiastical and political, I look to the Union to promote the former, and the patriot and the Church-Rate abolition agitation to create the latter." ²

The high-water mark of the Union in the first half of the century was the occasion in 1845, when the National Assembly met in Manchester. Considering the background of Nonconformity in Manchester, and its reluctance to discuss vital questions like Factory Reform and Rates of Wages, it is not surprising to discover that the subject for consideration was "The State of Religion in our Denomination".

I. Peel - op. cit. pp. 143-144.

² Idem p. 144.

It is true that cognizance was taken of important public events and conferences. The leaders of the fight against the Bible monopoly were congratulated; a deputation was sent to an International Conference for the Abolition of Slavery, and it was made clear to the American Churches that no delegate who was in favour of slavery would be *persona grata*.

Up to 1848, however, activity in regard to public questions was limited in the main to the parallel lines of education and resistance to measures which infringed civil and religious liberty. There was one exception, and that was an attempt after the May Meetings of 1840 to form a Society to work among the working-classes under the name of "British missions". The Committee's letter to the Churches contains this paragraph.

"Amidst the dark shades of papal superstition - taught to depend for salvation on sacramental efficacy, and priestly ministrations crowding the scenes of Sabbath desecration, filling the lecture halls of socialism or of Chartist agitation, spread over your fair rural districts in hopeless ignorance and apathy, or filling with squalor and vice the busy scenes of your commercial and manufacturing activity - they are the victims of intemperance and infidelity - of scanty wages and neglected education - they fill your jails,

man your ships, found your colonies." ^I Actually, however, this stirring and understanding appeal was used merely to establish an Annual October Collection of Home Mission Work. As in Wesleyan Methodism, there were these occasional stirrings, but, in the main, Congregationalism pursued her denominational course - unmindful of the great social and political problem of the time. Only when Chartism was dead did Congregationalists take up the great liberal struggle to give effect to many of the dreams of the Chartists.

CHAPTER XI

Baptists and Chartism

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It was Professor Masson who declared "Not to the Church of England, nor to Scottish Presbyterianism, nor to English Puritanism does the honour of the first perception of the full principle of liberty of conscience and its first assertion in English speech belong. That honour has to be assigned, I believe, to the Independents generally, and to the Baptists in particular."¹ It belongs, in fact, to the tiny Baptist Church established in London in 1612 by Thomas Helwys.

It is probably true to say that the Baptists treated the aspirations of the Chartists more sympathetically than any other religious body. The whole record of the denomination during the nineteenth century indicates that it was far more in touch with the life of the people than the Congregationalists and far more in sympathy with their political ambitions than the Methodists. Of all the Nonconformist Churches, they alone pursued any clear policy in the fight for the separation of Church and State. Other Churches occasionally provided leaders for the movement; the Baptist ministers were the only organised clerical body to

1. Quoted by Silvester Horne - History of the Free Churches

support it as a whole. At the great Conference of the Liberation Society in 1844, Baptists were the only people specifically represented as a denomination. A further indication of their attitude was that the "Eclectic Review", a Liberal paper favouring a widening of the franchise, was read only by a few left-wing Congregationalists, while it was the literary periodical of a very large number of Baptists.

The story of the Baptists in Lancashire begins about 1650. The General Baptist Movement of 1612 never reached Lancashire at all, nor did the London Movement of Particular Baptists which reached its greatest influence in 1642. It was Cromwell's¹ New Model Army, containing Baptists, which won adherents here. At this time Lancashire was one of the poorest counties, and was notoriously the most backward in religion.

The first decade of the nineteenth century saw the Particular Baptists drawing off into two groups. One stood by the Westminster Confession, as modified by Baptists in 1677; the other had listened to the revivalists of the next century as interpreted by Andrew Fuller, and this second group was lending itself to evangelising, first abroad, and then at home. A new wave of Baptist influence was now breaking in Lancashire. Dr. Whitley's history of Lancashire Baptists at this time is anything but clear, but it is obvious that in the first half

1. Baptists of North-West England. - W.T. Whitley.p.31.

of the nineteenth century many new causes were started, and that an Association of Lancashire¹ and Yorkshire Baptist Churches was established. This was, in fact a revival of an earlier Association founded by Dr. John Fawcett at Colne in Lancashire¹ in 1787. In 1814 a circular letter stated that thirty-two Churches had accepted inviolably certain doctrinal principles, and were in membership with the Association, but it is obvious that many Baptist Churches in Lancashire remained outside this Union.² William Steadman, the first secretary, reports the conducting of services at Preston, Sabden, Colne, Accrington, Harwood, Manchester, Lancaster and Ulverston.

In 1818, Moses Fisher, of the Byron St. Church, Liverpool, wrote the "Circular Letter", which appears to indicate that the centre of Baptist evangelisation was at Rochdale, and in no uncertain language describes the social situation of the time. "Lancashire alone contains a population of 800,000 souls the ignorance and depravity of multitudes are obvious. and the atrocities that are committed are truly lamentable. No assize in any county in the kingdom has perhaps ever exhibited so black a catalogue of crimes as the year 1817 presented at Lancaster..... The county has long been famous for supremacy in wickedness but of late it has even transcended its former enormities..... These evils may in some measure be accounted for by the vast increase of population and the

1. Circular Letters of the Association 1787-1913. - Letter for 1818.

promiscuous intercourse of the sexes in large manufactories The exertions to counteract these evils have not been proportioned to the increase of inhabitants; and consequently have been insufficient to stop the current of vice and immorality. There are loud calls for strenuous exertions to spread the Gospel."¹ It is true that this statement contains no suggestion of any major constitutional change being required to meet the situation, but it does present conditions as they really were and sets the task of the Church clearly in its social and human context.

It is interesting to discover that such plain speaking was not acceptable to all the member Churches and secessions as well as additions regularly occurred. The following chart gives an indication of the fortunes of the Association in Lancashire in the early nineteenth century.

Lancashire and Yorkshire Association 1810-1850

1810 - 28 Churches with 1700 members.

Liverpool (Lime Street), Haslingden, Meltham, Wigan, Inskip, Oldham - added.

1820 - 35 Churches with about 2,200 members.

Earby, Bacup (2), Bolton, Stalybridge, Liverpool (Cockspur Street), Burnley, Manchester, (George Street) - added.

1830 - 43 Churches with over 3,000 members.

Chapel Ford, Lockwood, Haslingden, Oldham (2), Heywood, Golcar, Long Preston, Ashton, Eccles, Goodshaw, Coniston, Liverpool (4) Tattlebank, - added.

1840 - 50 Churches with 3,500 members.

A few new churches and a few secessions. Additions mainly in Manchester and Blackburn.

1850 - Roughly 50 Churches with 3,400 members. ^{1.}

There were, of course, many Baptist Churches founded which remained outside this Association and it is clear that the number of Baptists in the county increased steadily during the Chartist age. In addition, there are many instances of the evangelistic zeal of the Association linking itself with the reform movements of the people. Such was the reputation of the Baptist Evangelists, that, in 1829, the Government required the constables to send lists of the number of places of worship for Baptist dissenters and the estimated number of residents frequenting them. The original returns are in the Sessions House at Preston, and show that 66 Baptist chapels were known, ^{2.} and 10,946 people were reported as attending them. Thus in 1830 there were 8,000 Baptists outside the Association, but standing in the eyes of the Government for that sympathy with working-class movements for which the Association was noted.

In 1838 a movement which was at first complementary to, but gradually superseded, this first Association arose. This was the Lancashire (and Cheshire) Association. The new title

1. Table Appendix. Vol (i) Baptist Historical Society Accounts 1913.

2. Whitley - op.cit. p.178.

represented an aspiration rather than a fact, for there was only one Cheshire Church in the new union of Churches. The county Baptist Churches had clearly become sufficient in themselves, and were able to set up their own organisation. There was in fact, no split with the Yorkshire Baptists, but the Churches having become too numerous for any town conveniently to accommodate the ministers and messengers, it was resolved, at Hebden Bridge, in 1837, to form separate Associations for Lancashire and Yorkshire respectively. The spirit of comradeship was not lessened by this division, and arrangements were made and continued until 1851 "to meet biennially."

The tolerant spirit towards the aspiration of the workers must not be exaggerated, for in the early days of the "Association" very little interest was taken in political questions. On the whole the members of the Baptist Churches were poor men, for factory operatives; if they belonged to any of the regular churches, tended to belong to the Baptist or Methodist denominations. Thus very few of these Lancashire Baptists had a vote and for a few years walked circumspectly lest the measure of religious freedom they had already received should be lost. They sat under the shadow of the Toleration Act with thankfulness and scarcely any political questions appeared upon the Minutes¹ or imperilled the happy serenity of the Annual Assembly.

1. Article by John Haslam 'Baptist Historical Society' Accounts Vol. I. p.300.

As the year 1830 approached, however, interest in political questions becomes more obvious. Either politics had invaded the Churches, or they were girding themselves to take a share in the political life of the nation. Frequent resolutions appear, intended to strengthen the hands of Lord John Russell and his colleagues in their conflict with religious disabilities. For a few years political discussion was, in the main, confined to the grievances of Dissenters in relation to the Church of England, but here the Baptists surpassed other denominations in the unity and firmness of their claims. In 1835, for example, the Assembly declared "that the first step fairly to meet the claims of Dissenters should be the passing of a law for the civil registration of births, marriages and burials, applicable to all classes of His Majesty's subjects."

The question of Negro Slavery was frequently discussed and strong resolutions adopted, expressing deep regret that it was not only allowed, but even practised, by members of the American Baptist Churches. In 1841, the Association again protested against slavery, declaring that it would not maintain communion with any professor of religion who was either a slave holder or an avowed advocate of slavery.

In 1846 the Lancashire and Yorkshire Associations held united meetings at Bradford, and the chief speaker was a

1. Idem p. 301.

certain Mr. Clowes, who declared that God had given the ecclesiastical and civil liberties of the country into the hands of the Church. "We are called upon to save the nation's liberties, and while we seek first the rights of our Lord, He may add again unto us the rights of man. We must never forget the two fundamental principles - the exclusive supremacy of Christ in His Church, and the right, or rather the duty, of private judgement. We must point out the abuses connected with all State establishments We are 'men' a component part of the legislative power, and we are placed by God in this position, that we should, at the cost of much temporary contempt or even persecution, merit the lasting glory of consummating English liberty. Ours is the duty of an enlightened ministry; it is ours to instruct our fellow countrymen "^{1.}

In the troubled year of 1848, the Annual Sermons at the Lancashire Association meeting at Bacup were preached by the Revs. Davis, Lancaster and Brown, all of them on "The Duties of Nonconformists as Citizens."^{2.}

In 1844, the Rev. C. Thompson had given an address at the Annual Assembly in Manchester on the "Probable influence

1. Haslam - op cit p.301-302.

2. Papers of Baptist Historical Society Vol. II. p.320.

of our principles as Baptists in the present state and future prospects of Society, especially as regards civil and religious liberty.¹ This gave rise to such acrimonious discussion that the Association would not adopt any official resolution and so no 'Circular Letter' setting out the results of the Assembly was despatched that year. It was doubtful if any groups of traditional Christians in the country other than the Baptists were prepared to debate the political issues of the Chartist age on the floors of their Assemblies. On the question of education, however, these Baptists spoke with a resolute voice, and many of the Churches maintained their own Schools with no help from the Annual Government grant of £20,000 paid to the British and Foreign School Society and its Anglican rival, the National School Society. In 1844, George Foster of Sabden called a Baptist educational conference whose resolutions met with general acceptance. Every Church was advised to establish a Day School, and not to accept any aid which would give control over the plan of education or hinder the use of the premises for preaching stations. If the members of the Conference did not share the Chartist's aim of secular education, they shared his enthusiasm for universal education.

The Baptists of Lancashire early revealed a sense of responsibility for the education of children, and an under-

¹ Idem p.193.

standing of the acute problems arising from their employment in the factories. Clearly, amid the chaos of the early "industrial system" the only time left for educating the "industrial class" came to be that Sunday which was by law secured against the greed of the work-master. A few typical cases may be referred to, representing the two types of Baptists. In 1811, Robert Kay and George Dean of Bursley rented upper rooms in a cottage, and taught reading and writing on Sundays. The Accrington Church was even better, for, in 1806, it gathered thirty or forty children in the old Chapel, thus forming the first Nonconformist Sunday School in that place. As early as 1821, the Church at Wigan started up "Evening Classes" in addition to its Sunday work, and was followed in this venture by Lineholme and Haslingden. When a second Church was established at Haslingden, it opened a Day School at once, and built premises by 1850 to be used seven days in the week. Of all the cases Dr. Whitley quotes however, Sabden is the most interesting, for there they paid the children to come, an example of Christian concern for children unequalled in the history of the period.¹ By 1835 Wigan and Lineholme Churches had collected libraries, putting something like 800 volumes at the disposal of their members.

These earliest schools were held anywhere, upper rooms

¹ Whitley - op cit. pp.266-267.

being both economical and scriptural. Gradually, however, buildings suitable for the purpose were erected. The schools had behind them the keen support of the Lancashire Association, for as early as 1818, Moses Fisher, in drafting the "Annual Letter", mentioned Sunday schools in his first paragraph, declaring that their establishment formed an important epoch in the history of the nation¹ and promised in a future age to alter the face of society. Twelve years later the Association directed James Lister to prepare a letter which should call the attention of Church members to the value of such education, and he responded with a paragraph in the "Circular Letter" of 1831. Already, he declared, the Sunday Schools had prevented incalculable evil; and he supposed that every single Church in the Association now had established such an organisation. He was, however, troubled by the aloof attitude adopted by some of the older members, and suggested that they might make themselves responsible for the setting-up and maintenance of a library. He regretted also that the usual instruction was too secular in its character, too low in its aim, which was too often only "the mere mechanical art of reading." He deplored the fact that too many members of the staff concentrated on secular teaching, to the exclusion² of definitely religious instruction.

¹ Circular Letter of Lancashire and Yorkshire, Baptist Association 1818. (collected Circular Letters of the Association 1787-1913.)

² Annual Circular - Ibid - 1831.

In 1840, when the Lancashire Association was quite separate from Yorkshire, David Marsh of Aston-under-Lyne wrote the "Circular Letter". He, too, suggests that the question of staffing presented difficulties, and that the burden of teaching was not accepted very eagerly by the older members. His great service was that he collected statistics, and gave the first clear indication of the extent of the educational activity. This letter shows that 28 schools taught 7,379 children, and that eight other schools of the Association made¹ no returns.

This 1840 Circular has a wider interest than that of education. Marsh proceeded to define the aims of the Association, and laid emphasis on the cultivation of enlarged and practical Christian union, and on the importance of attending to these civil questions which affect its interests. In 1841, the Association discussed the Corn Laws, the protection of young girls in the factories and sent petitions on behalf of social injustices to Parliament. In 1844, a committee was appointed with the specific task of dealing with civil² questions. Although Dr. Whitley dismisses this as a passing phase, it is refreshing to find a Church Council in 1844 attempting to deal with such topics as social evils and the principles of international dealing, two of the items on the agenda at the Annual Assembly.³

1 Annual Circular - 1840.

2 Circulars of 1841 and 1844.

3 Whitley - op cit. p.281.

What was true of the Baptists in Lancashire was true, on the whole, of the denomination throughout the country. J.C. Carlile, one of the leading Baptist historians, claims that the attitude of the Baptists towards the Chartist Movement was exemplified in the person of Thomas Cooper.¹ During the eighteen months of his influence in 1841-2 Cooper and his followers adopted tactics resembling the physical force tactics of O'Connor. He ran several newspapers in succession, conducted innumerable meetings, and rapidly acquired an immense following, which he proceeded to organise. He rented a large hall and set up a headquarters naming his flock the "Shakespearean Association of Leicester Chartists." By the summer of 1842 he claimed 2,500 members. He divided them up into classes.... devised a kind of uniform, gave to his adherents a quasi-military organisation and proudly bore the title of "Shakespearean General". By these means - the magic of uniforms and badges - Cooper developed a really admirable 'esprit de corps' among his followers, who idolised him. But he was not content with demonstrations. He took pains to give his disciples education in an adult school and amusement of the right sort.² It is indicative of the increasing support given to social reform by the Baptist Churches that

¹ J.C. Carlile - Story of English Baptists pp.224-5.

² See Article by Alfred Plummer on "The Chartists" in "Great Democrats". Edited by A. Barratt Brown p.179.

they should claim such a leader as representative of their attitude. Further weight is given to this point by the fact that Disraeli makes a Baptist teacher one of the inner circle ^{of} by conspirators in his Chartist novel "Sybil".

In 1848 the Baptists started the "Penny Magazine", the editorial policy of which was quite distinctively on the side of a "Radical Democracy". It had a very ready sale among the members of the Baptist Churches. Edward Miall's "Nonconformist" with its wide sympathy for the workers, found a much wider sale among the Baptists than among the members of any of the other Nonconformist Churches. Many of the leaders of the Denomination took a prominent part in democratic movements. Gammage ~~for~~¹ instances the case of William Jackson of Manchester, who was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment for "maliciously conspiring and inciting the people of this country to make riots, to arm with weapons of offence, and with divers other acts for the promotion of rebellion." Outside Lancashire they were supported by J.P. Mansell, who gave his enthusiastic help to the Complete Suffrage Movement, by Eastace Giles, one of the founders of the Baptist Union, and an indefatigable worker in the cause of democracy; and by the great social reformer Dr. Stearne.

1. Gammage - History of the Chartist Movement p.178-179.

The service of the Baptists to the cause of Democracy from the time when Helwys tiny company met in London, until the present day, has been second to none.

CHAPTER XII.

The Roman Catholic Church.

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The Roman Catholic Church.

The emancipation of Roman Catholics in this country is generally dated from the passing of the Relief Act of 1829, though in fact they had been given an increasing measure of toleration since 1778. The Act of 1829 gave to them, in legal form, the rights of citizenship.

After 1829, Catholics were eligible for both Houses of Parliament, and for practically all civil offices. This greatly changed their status, for since Catholics now had a vote, they became of real importance to politicians. The effects of this were not at once obvious, for Catholics had for so many generations been unable to take their part in the public life of the country that it is small wonder that they had for all practical purposes become nonentities, and even when greater freedom came, there was an interval of years during which they appeared to be quite unable to use their new-found power. In fact, there still remained a reluctance among many of them to appear in public life as Catholics.

The official place of the Roman Catholic Church in the Chartist movement is small. At the time of the Emancipation the number of very poor amongst Catholics was probably

comparatively small. But in the 'thirties and 'forties thousands of them came into Lancashire, and the number of chapels for their use increased rapidly, particularly in Liverpool and Manchester. It was in these cities that the immigrants tended to concentrate. On the whole, they were illiterate and unambitious, and found even the poverty-stricken standards of the English labourers higher than anything they had known. It has already been pointed out,¹ in some detail, in an earlier chapter, how they provided a regular supply of cheap labour and decreased the power of the Chartist drive in Lancashire. Furthermore, in as highly authoritarian an organisation as the Roman Church, it is almost axiomatic that its leader would discourage participation by its members in democratic movements. The effect of Roman Catholicism in the whole course of social reform in the first half of the nineteenth century was negligible.

The most serious impact of Roman Catholicism at this period on social reform was that it diverted the attention of the Anglican Church from any serious consideration of problems affecting the daily life of the people. After the privileges granted in 1829 had come to be generally accepted, the Catholic leaders sought to re-establish the organisation of their Church in England as it had existed before the

¹ Chapter III - Specific Problems in Lancashire.

Reformation. Between 1840 and 1855 the Church of England was distracted by the threat of Roman aggression from without and by the suspicion of Roman tendencies within. The Papacy by its action, in partitioning the country into dioceses and bestowing territorial titles on their bishops, had aroused¹ a fury of opposition. If the motive of the action had been solely to create embarrassment for English Churchmen, it would have been a master-stroke; for the Tractarian Movement had already revived the fear of "Popery;" and this new move seemed like a deliberate challenge and an anticipation of triumph. The Government contented itself with loud protests, and passed certain restrictions on Catholic organisations² which were never enforced.

Among people of all denominations the action of Pope Pius IX excited the liveliest opposition. The pages of "The Christian Socialist" reflect the excitement of the public mind; and Lloyd Jones, who had been brought up a Roman Catholic has a revealing story to tell of this dispute. On Dec. 1st 1850, he went to Manchester to attend a Co-operative Congress and, during the whole of his journey, found himself debating this vexed question with his fellow passengers. At the meeting itself, he raised the anger of the audience by venturing to suggest that the best answer to papal aggression

¹ This occurred in 1850.

² England - Wilhelm Dibelius p.358.

would be protestant progression, and when he stuck to his guns was thrown out of the building.¹ This must have been unexpected, for Jones had learned the art of speaking to working men as a lecturer on "Owenite Socialism" and was noted for his literary skill and dexterity in debate. He had joined the ranks of the Christian Socialists because he had come to the decision that their methods were most likely to achieve success in the field of social reform.²

The "No Popery" campaign served to rally opposition to the Tractarians and compelled them to recognise that they had little hope of reconciling the Anglican Church with Rome. It was openly believed that the disciples of the Oxford Movement were secret agents in the papal campaign; traitors within the city, acting in concert with the enemy and pledged to its betrayal. The "Gorham Controversy"^{on} baptismal regeneration, and the anti-ritualist riots, were symptomatic of the public temper; and in the religious world the topic became predominant. All other questions were forgotten. The Church became involved in bitter sectarian strife; and however earnestly the Christian Socialists might endeavour to recall their fellow-countrymen to a sense of proportion, to plead for charity, and to urge that Christians had a call to something higher than party bitterness, their efforts were not likely to prevail, nor their work to receive the support which otherwise might have been given to it. J.M.

¹ Christian Socialist I pp.58,59.

² Christian Socialism 1848-1854 - C.R.Raven pp.140-141,

Ludlow may well be forgiven his irony of speech when he contrasts the fury of religious folk over certain ritualistic practices and their passive acceptance of the most brutal¹ of sweat-shops.

This controversy of the Roman Catholics with the Established Church - lies outside the scope of this work, but it affords an example of the indirect way in which the "Catholic Problem" affected the life of the people. The whole question of the effect of Catholicism on the spirit and achievements of the Age of Reform might well be made the² subject of a separate and exhaustive study.

1 Christian Socialist I p.33.

2 See Introduction.

CHAPTER XIII

The Social Attitude of
The Unitarians.

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The Social Attitude
of the Unitarians.

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The attitude of the Unitarians to social reform in the Chartist era is of particular interest. Their rejection of the orthodox doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ and their tendency to a materialistic conception of life, caused many traditional Churchmen and Nonconformists to deny to them the name Christian. It was an easy matter for the Unitarians as a sect to make an alliance with the Benthamites. The prominent Unitarian leader of the time, John Bowring, had been a friend of John Stuart Mill. After the passing of the Reform Act in 1832, he stood as a candidate for Parliament and after being narrowly defeated^{1.} on two occasions, was returned for Bolton in 1841. He is

1. R. V. Holt - The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England. p. 140.

chiefly noted for the fact that, as a result of his activities, the Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association was formed in 1838. When the Chartists presented their petition, he joined John Fielden in putting the motion in Parliament that the case for Chartism should be heard.

On the whole the liberal-minded Unitarians seem to have been afraid of the revolutionary possibilities in Chartism. Yet the Chartists did have a fair number of sympathisers among the Unitarians. James Stansfield sympathised with the movement, though Feargus O'Connor described him as "a capitalist wolf in sheep's clothing". In later years however he showed the influence of Chartist philosophy in his great struggle for sex-equality, and in his enthusiastic support of Mazzini in the cause of Italian freedom. Raymond Holt, the social historian of Unitarianism, lists a considerable number of Unitarians who were known as Chartists. Among them appear notable names such as those of Ebenezer Eliot (the Corn Law and a Chartist Poet), William Wrigley, one of the first Mayors of Oldham, and J. W. Morris. Among the working-class Unitarians of Lancashire there was probably more sympathy than any historian has recorded, but Unitarianism did not make its main appeal to the proletariat, but to the intelligentsia. In general Unitarians favoured the extension of the franchise, but they were far from being enthusiastic about universal suffrage. This may have been due not so much to their desire to keep

privilege in the hands of a minority, as to their conviction that education should precede the franchise. In making such judgments, however, it must be clearly borne in mind that there has been no period in English history in which there were more cross-currents in thought and action. There are certainly few periods in which so disproportionate a significance may be given to isolated incidents.

In examining any of the great social movements of the times it is difficult to generalise about the attitude of the Unitarians. For instance, in the long and bitter struggle for factory reform, Unitarians are to be found fighting on both sides with equal fervour. When the Factory Act was passed in 1847, the second reading was moved by a unitarian, John Fielden, who had worked untiringly for its success. But he was opposed by three well-known Unitarians, Mark Philips, John Bowring and Edward Strutt. There seems little doubt that such men opposed the Ten Hours Bill, not because they were insensitive to the horrors suffered by children, but because the childrens' hours could not in practice be regulated without regulating the hours worked by adults. To do this by Act of Parliament seemed to these Utilitarians almost like breaking a law of Nature, so that only a worse evil could result. "Mark Philips said that he had no personal interest in the passing or rejection of this Bill; but he was bound to look

at the position of the vast mass of operatives..... Could these operatives live upon ten hours' pay for ten hours' work? He was confident that if the questions were put to the ballot, the operatives would be against it. Why did not the workmen combine to compel the masters to try the experiment?"^{1.} It is significant that many Chartists opposed the Bill for the same reason.

The prevailing economic system was, of course, favourable to such opposition. It was believed to be susceptible of mathematical proof that the hours of factory labour could not be reduced to ten a day without ruining the industry and causing widespread unemployment. The arguments of those who opposed the Bill were twofold. On the one hand, they appealed to the accepted law of economics and the natural right of every man to make the best bargain he could for himself. On the other hand they argued that the operatives would be thrown out of work by foreign competition if the Bill were passed. These were the lines of argument adopted by the Unitarian paper "The Inquirer", in its defence of competitive enterprise, and led naturally to the viewpoint which Peel expressed in the great debate on the Ten Hours Bill in 1847 - "I could name a dozen cases..... of men who were once living upon 20 or 25 shillings a week but who now possess fortunes' of £100,000. But who is to answer for

1. R. V. Holt. Ibid p. 180.

the result if you paralyse the efforts of such men by your
^{1.}
 legislation?

It can be said with truth that no denomination (with the exception perhaps of the Baptists) and no political party has anything to be proud of in the chapter of English social history represented by Factory Reform. The Ten Hours Bill was forced on the politicians by an increasingly informed public opinion. All that can be said is that the Whigs were prepared to bow to public opinion when it was strong enough to threaten their dominance. In one way they helped to create this public opinion, for, in order to stave off action, they set up committees to investigate the problem further, and each committee brought forward devastating evidence of an irrefutable character, which more than confirmed all that the propagandists had said. It was a victory of knowledge and conscience; and although it took a long time for this knowledge to penetrate into the public conscience, action soon followed after it had entered.

Some of the Unitarians carried their objection to factory reform to remarkable lengths. Harriet Martineau (sister of the famous Unitarian Minister, James Martineau) carried her opposition so far that she even wrote and spoke against the compulsory fencing of machinery. It is only fair to add that

1. Annual Register 1847, p.118.

her brother's views on the subject were far more moderate.

The real social emphasis of Unitarianism is seen in its attitude to the Anti-Corn Law League, a movement sponsored by the manufacturers. ^{1.} Prentice, the historian of the League dated it from a meeting in 1826, promoted by Sir. T. Potter, at which Mark Philips made his first appearance before the public. When the Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association was formed in 1836 as a result of the activities of John Bowring, a large number of Unitarians were actively associated with it as members of Committee and in other ways. The same was true of the Association in Liverpool and of the branches of the Anti-Corn Law League in every large town in the county. ^{2.}

Throughout the county the branches of the League began to raise funds, and during the course of the campaign large amounts of money were subscribed. With these funds they set on foot an immense propaganda campaign for the conversion and organisation of public opinion. The Parliamentary reformers had invented these methods, the abolitionists had developed them and now Free Traders roused and organised public opinion in a way which was still a novelty in those days. In every town, village and city, large meetings were held at which the most important speakers were Richard Cobden, John Bright and the

1. Archibald Prentice - History of the Corn Law League (1853)

2. R. V. Holt - op cit P.197 et seq.

Rev. W. J. Fox M.P. The last named was a Unitarian minister, but his views proved to be too radical for his colleagues and he was compelled to leave the ministry. He continued to take an active part in politics as M.P. for^{1.} Olcham.

It is difficult to make any clear generalisation on the social witness of Unitarians during the Chartist decade, for Unitarian opinion was consistent neither in opposing nor in supporting the working-class cause. Certain salient characteristics do, however, stand out. The Unitarians cared profoundly for freedom, though they tended to think of freedom passively rather than actively. They were noted for their humanitarianism, and in their expressions of concern for the social well-being of their fellows; they were not hampered by any belief in the depravity of man or the doctrine of original sin. They stressed the individuality of men, and it was this high valuation of personality which led them into an easy acceptance of the principles of laissez-faire, which were based on the theories of Malthus and Ricardo - an attitude which limited their sympathy in their approach to the problems of the times, and led them to the conviction that it was not possible to alleviate distress by raising wages.

1. R. V. Holt. - Ibid p.199.

Most of the old-established Unitarian congregations are to be found in Lancashire and the calibre of their members may be gauged from the fact that many of the High Sheriffs of the County had been members of such congregations. When the Free Traders¹ held meetings in the halls of Unitarian Churches the physical-force elements of Chartism turned out in strength, for they were convinced that a movement which had the backing of the Unitarians must be of benefit to the employers rather than to the workers. At such meetings they voiced their suspicions that the real purpose of the Anti-Corn Law League was to lower wages.

It seems true, however, that Unitarianism produced great social leaders. No man did more to make living conditions healthy and decent in the early nineteenth century than did Edwin Chadwick. Hated both by rich and by poor, for some time he was possibly the most unpopular man in England. His ablest colleague in this work, however, was Thomas Southwood Smith -
1.
a Unitarian Minister and a doctor. It was in his youth that he was converted to the Unitarian faith and he studied for the Unitarian Ministry. As his course ended he married, but the sudden death of his wife turned his thoughts to medicine. He went to Edinburgh to study medicine and while he was there,

1. For an account see Barbara L. Hutchins "The Public Health Agitation" 1833-1848.

took charge of the congregation of St. Mark's; under his ministry the Congregation greatly increased. He assisted in the formation of the Scottish Unitarian Association in 1813, and published an appeal in 1815 in defence of its cause. In 1820, he came to London, and combined the work of a large private practice with voluntary service at the London Fever Hospital. In 1832, he was appointed a member of the Committee whose report on conditions in the factories led to the beginnings of the first effective reform. The next thirty years of his life were devoted to a crusade against the insanitary conditions under which most townspeople lived. This sketch of Southwood Smith's life is indicative of the indirect way in which the Unitarians' valuation of the individual impelled them to attempt to ameliorate the conditions of the workers. That was in fact the attitude of the sect, a slow, progressive change, rather than a dramatic fight against obvious evils.

Schemes for providing decent homes for weekly wage-earners at reasonable rents have appealed to Unitarians. As early as 1847, J. R. Beard and Abel Heywood helped to promote the Working Men's Benefit Building Society in Manchester, while so notable a Unitarian as John Fielden took part in the Factory Reform Movement.

Early in life John Fielden became dissatisfied with the Quakerism of his father, for the Quakers at that time were still passing through a period of rigid orthodoxy very often accompanied by conservative quietism. Fielden tried first the Methodists and then the church of England. He found what he

wanted in 1818, when Richard Wright, the Unitarian missionary, preached at Toomordaen. "These Views," said Fielden, "harmonise more with my ideas of what Christ Himself has taught than any other I have yet heard". Fielden joined the Toomordaen Unitarian Congregation and taught a Bible class in ^{the} Sunday School, of which he became Superintendent. ^{1.} His position as a successful manufacturer persuaded many to listen to him who would have paid no attention either to working men or to rural landowners, and the profits of his business enabled him to find a large part of the funds required for the factory reform movement. To help on the movement, Fielden became a Member of Parliament. "When I consented to become a member of Parliament it was not with a view to hearing party men or aiding in party movements, but in order to assist by my vote in doing such things as I thought would benefit the labouring people as well on the land as in the factory and at the loom. I have all my years of manhood been a Radical reformer, because I thought reform would give the people a power in the House of Commons that would secure to them that better condition of which they are worthy..... The object of the following pages is to show that the work-people have been and are cruelly treated; and that they have not idly asked for protection, but that humanity and justice require it; that we shall do ourselves no

harm by granting it to them; but always avowing that I would cast manufacturers to the winds rather than see the work-people enslaved, maimed, vitiated, and broken in constitution and in heart, as these pages will but too amply prove that they are now.¹" This extract from his pamphlet reveals how Fielden's Unitarianism was happily combined with a sensitive social conscience. Although Fielden was not typical of the Unitarian manufacturers their ranks did include such people.

During these years the Unitarians were in open conflict with the Congregationalists and the Baptists, who were doing their utmost to expel them from the old Committee of the "Three Denominations", and even to deprive them of their chapels which, they maintained, had been founded originally for Trinitarian teaching and therefore must not be left in the hands of ministers who violated the intention of their founders. The Unitarians also refused to support the other Nonconformist bodies in their fight for the disestablishment of the Church of England and the expulsion of the bishops from the House of Lords. Indeed, most Unitarians were well disposed to the Church of England. They were opposed to abuses like the levying of Church rates, which Samuel Courtauld fought at Braintree in lawsuits that lasted from 1837 to 1855; they demanded the right to marry and to bury their own members; but only a few Unitarians followed Joseph

1. In the preface to "The Curse of the Factory System" by John Fielden.

Priestley in actively demanding the separation of Church and State. Their age-long dream was of a Church open to all those who professed and called themselves Christian. Some Unitarians were convinced that the connection between the Church and the State tended to foster religious toleration by relegating to the State or Parliament the control of the Church. All disputes had to be referred "not to a council of priests, always bigoted and tyrannical, but to the ordinary law courts..... this has made the Church of England and Ireland the most tolerant Church that has ever existed - but separate the Church from the State, and all this freedom¹ vanishes" They preferred, therefore, that Parliament should make the Church of England in reality the Church of the English people, and not that it should sink to the level of a sect.

No survey of the social influence of Unitarianism can be accurate which ignores its contribution to the policy which transformed England from a semi-feudal State in 1760, to a country which in 1832 possessed the framework of a political/democracy. The early stage of this movement owed more to Unitarians than to any other group. The outstanding Radicals who first appealed to public opinion and organised it in favour of the Radical Reform of Parliament were Unitarians. This

1. R. V. Holt - op cit P 347 - 8.

fact was recognised by their enemies, and when this movement was interrupted by the French Revolution of 1789 and the Wars with Napoleon, which lasted till 1815, and hysteria seized both the Government and the mob, Unitarians were everywhere the chief victims of the English Terror. The burning of the house and laboratory of the Rev. Joseph Priestley, F.R.S., who was not only a minister of religion, but is recognised as the father of British chemistry, - is typical of the hatred felt for them. When the Reform Bill became law, the Duke of Wellington spoke of it as a victory for the Unitarians. It was also, of course, a victory for the prosperous middle-class, and it was with that class that Unitarians tended always to be linked.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Quakers and Social Reform.

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There are clear indications of three main trends of thought in the religious life of seventeenth century England. Many Christian people still placed the main emphasis on the authority of the Church, and clung to the Roman Catholic Church - "a visible, hierarchical institution, which is the divinely commissioned vehicle and guarantee of the truth or the Gospel."¹ There was also at this time a developing and militant Protestantism which, in its Anglican, Calvinistic, and Lutheran varieties tended to emphasise the sole authority of the Bible. The third main stream of thought could, rather loosely, be termed the mystical, and this found its clearest expression in the witness and writings of George Fox, after he had left his Leicestershire home in 1643, in search of religious truth. Here, the sanction of faith was found in the spirit of the worshipper; while the standards of individual conduct depended on the judgments of the individual's "Inner Light". This "Inner Light" has been defined by Dr. R. M. Jones^{Rufus} in these terms: "~~Over against the vast system of doctrine which was~~"

1. J. S. Whale. "Christian Doctrine" (1942) p.14.

the vast system of doctrine which was pronounced essential for salvation, the Quaker had found a new and living way - the inner way of direct relation of the soul with a present and living Christ.^{1.}

But though the Society of Friends did not take form until the latter half of the seventeenth century, it was making articulate the idea of "divine individualism" which had earlier been expressed by the Diggers and Levellers, ideas which had something basically in common with the voluntary community of believers, the "congregationalism" of the Independents and the Baptists.^{2.} "Quakerism is thus no isolated religious phenomenon. It is deeply rooted and embedded in a far wider movement that had been accumulating volume and power for more than a century before George Fox became its 'prophet' to the English people. This movement.....was a serious attempt.....to restore primitive Christianity, and to change the basis of authority from external things to the inner light and spirit of man."

During the eighteenth century, when the gap between religion and economic behaviour became wider and wider, the Quaker belief in the divine imperative in each man to treat

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1. R. M. Jones. "Later Periods of Quakerism" Vol. 1. p.437.
 2. W. A. C. Stewart. "Educational Theory of the Society of Friends" (Unpublished Thesis) Chap. 1.
 3. E. B. Emmott. "A Short History of Quakerism" p.70.

his fellows with justice was applied by members of the Society to their commercial life. In course of time, Quakers isolated themselves as a "peculiar people", and, freed from the distractions of ordinary life, were able to build up large and flourishing businesses, by reason of popular confidence in their integrity. "Early in the reign of George II, they were already famous for their knack of prospering in honestly conducted business."^{1.} Quaker traders employed members of the Society to a very large degree, and developed the ideal of an employer's responsibility to his workers. Their success in commercial life may be gauged from the fact that it was largely Quaker money which financed the development of the railways in the 1830's.^{2.} "Eventually, without developing any clear-cut theory of their own, Friends for the most part adopted the current Protestant view of the calling, quietly accumulating wealth almost in spite of themselves, but controlling its use under an austere consciousness of the deceitfulness of riches and of the Christian's duty to the poor..... Later, however, they became distinctly bourgeois..... The general body of Quaker bankers, merchants, farmers, craftsmen, while separate in religious practice and outlook, were yet part of

1. G. M. Trevelyan. "English Social History" p.363.

2. W. A. C. Stewart. Op. Cit. p.66.

the solid middle-class of the period.^{1.}

Such was the position of the Quakers at the beginning of the Chartist era; they evinced a sense of compassion for the poor, but a spirit of holy detachment from any political attempts to remedy the great social evils of the time. Their outlook during the age of reform was thus not widely different from that of the average members of the Anglican and Methodist Churches. The recognition of social responsibility began and ended, among Quakers, as an individual matter. That such help should be anything more than palliative - that it should attempt to modify the framework of society - was an idea that developed slowly. This was largely owing to the limitations imposed upon them, in common with other Nonconformists, as well as to that strong bias towards individualism resulting from the traditional Quaker training, and accounts for the repeated warnings issued by the Yearly Epistles urging members to take no part in politics. Quakers who took an active part in politics tended to incur the displeasure of their fellows.

1.E. Troeltsch. "Social Teaching of the Christian Churches"
(Trans. by Olive Wyon) p. 781.

In the first "General Advices to Friends" issued in 1834 to be read in district Meetings, the only references to the Quaker relationship with the world outside are:-

"Follow peace with all men, desiring the true happiness of all; and be liberal to the poor, endeavouring to promote their temporal, moral and religious well-being.

Maintain strict integrity in all your transactions in trade and in your other outward concerns, remembering that you will have to account for the mode of acquiring; and the manner of using, your possessions.

Encourage your apprentices and servants of all descriptions to attend public worship, make way for them herein, and exercise a watchful care for their moral and religious improvement".

That was the guidance given at the opening of the Chartist era - a time when the whole of the social and industrial life of England had just been transformed by the enclosures in the country and the growth of factories in the town, when the Poor Law was in the melting pot, when elementary education was springing into life and the people were demanding a share in the government of the country. Against such a social background three general principles are recognised and pressed home to the individual conscience - liberality to the poor, integrity

in trade, and personal care for the religious life of immediate employees. This document shows the Society of Friends to be still a body of employers - farmers, shopkeepers and small manufacturers - seeking to establish colonies of Christians in the midst of an apparently pagan population. They appeared to accept no responsibility for the organisation of the community in which they lived.

Quakerism, however, had something which tended to modify the current views, even though the position was not stated definitely. The resemblances and differences are exemplified in the many activities of William Allen on behalf of the poor and degraded. Allen was a successful business man, specialising in the manufacture of medical drugs, and was at the same time a scholar. He laboured with Wilberforce for the Abolition of Slavery and then turned his attention to the miseries afflicting the workers of his own country.^{1.} When famine came upon the weavers of Spitalfields, he convened a visiting committee of forty Friends at his own house, and with them started a soup kitchen for all comers. He took over the

1. Joshua Rowntree - "Social Service - Its place in the Society of Friends" (Swathmore Lecture for 1913)
p. 58 ff.

British and Foreign School Society from that erratic genius, Joseph Lancaster, and raised a fund for its support. He put much energy into the work of the Bible Society, started and edited a valuable Journal "The Philanthropist", and became one of the principal shareholders in Robert Owen's great experiment of the Lanark Mills, hoping that they would prove to be examples to the whole manufacturing world.^{1.}

Yet his social outlook was curiously limited. He approved of Joseph Lancaster's experiment in education by which one more advanced pupil taught a large group of others and where the Bible was the only book used for all purposes. Here is his description of such a school. "I beheld a thousand children collected from the street where they were learning nothing but mischief, one bad boy corrupting another, all reduced to the most perfect order, and trained to habits of subordination and usefulness and learning the great truths of the Gospel from the Bible".^{2.} Or again where he looks at society and suggests his remedy for all its ills - he reveals how little he looked to economic changes to remove existing

1. James Sherman - "Life of William Allen" (1851)

2. Quoted in "The New Social Outlook" (Swarthmore Lecture 1918)
L. F. Morland P.20.

and recognised evils.

"All these objects, however," he said, (speaking of Poor Law and other reforms), "are in my mind only secondary to the great cause of the general education of the poor. If the population generally could be rendered virtuous, a large portion of the present misery would disappear. Wise measures must be taken for ameliorating the condition of mankind, and I look upon the universal diffusion of knowledge, the general spread of the Holy Scripture, and the exertions of wise and good men in different directions, to promote the happiness of their fellow-creatures."^{1.}

All through the nineteenth century personal social service in varied forms occupied the sympathies of the Quakers, and only in rare cases, such as that of John Bright, did any of their members take a prominent part in the political life of the time. They remained middle-class business people, for the most part, - people who had command of some leisure and some property. While their training endowed them with an aptitude for business, it kept them apart from many worldly occupations. One point must be noted; their recognition of equality within their own Community, their belief in the spiritual possibilities of every human personality, encouraged a wider recognition of the

1. Ibid p.20.

claims of humanity, as such.

Two activities stand out pre-eminently as having enlisted the sympathy and support of the Quakers- Education and Temperance. Whenever there was any considerable group of Friends, some would be found managing a British School, and some would be engaged in some form of Temperance propaganda. It is indicative of the Quaker trend that both of these activities were concerned with the existing social order. The desire of the Quaker philanthropists was to help the working people to live more contented and more wholesome lives within the conditions belonging to their class, to teach them thrift, to assist them in sudden and difficult emergencies, to provide interests and occupations for their leisure.

In the eighteenth century many Quakers were well-known as brewers, and it is strange to find them in the role of Temperance Reformers in the nineteenth.¹ Newbould suggests that by this time Quakers had come to control large sections of industry, and, as factory owners had become familiar with the effects of alcohol on the steadiness of the worker, on his productive capacity, and on his reliability.

They saw his wages disappear without rebuilding his strength and renovating his body and his wits. They saw also their fellow-capitalists fall behind when they neglected the saving grace of thrift, a virtue of pre-eminent importance__

L. See Quakerism and Capitalism. A pamphlet by J.T.W.Newbould.

in that formative period of capitalist industry, when every fraction of ready money counted so much in taking advantage of the opportunities of a competitive struggle. They did not realise, and could not be expected to realise, that the introduction of the more costly and complex machines, and the setting up of large factories, made it impossible for more than ^a₁ favoured few to attain to independence, to competence or to mastery. Temperance Reform is an ideal essentially of the thrifty painstaking industrialist, and just as essentially attracts and holds the working man who hopes ultimately to become a master - ill-founded though such a hope might be, for Temperance has no power to emancipate a propertyless class from economic dependence

The spirit of philanthropy which characterised the Society of Friends enabled them to render an ameliorative service to the poor out of proportion to the size of their organisation. But their insistence on the lessons of subordination and discipline for the poor, and their declaration that though rich and poor were equal in the sight of God, effective equality could only come in another world, prevented their giving any kind of practical support to the Chartist Movement or any other movement designed to change the political framework of the country.^{1.}

1. Journal of Thomas Shillitoe (1839)

CHAPTER XV.

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Chartism and the Co-operative
Movement.

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In the "Age of Reform", Rochdale was a key town in Northern industrial England, second only to Manchester and Leeds as a centre of working-class agitation. It was a town of about 25,000 inhabitants, with another 40,000 living in the surrounding villages. Industrially it dealt mainly in textile, though there were coal mines in the immediate neighbourhood and the coal industry had been growing rapidly since the advent of steam power.

In the early 1840's, the town was faced with a serious social situation. Wages, had they been regular, were just about enough to keep body and soul together, but, in fact, they were anything but regular. Both the cotton and woollen industries, but especially the latter, were subject to violent economic fluctuations, with booms and slumps alternating every few months. Sharman Crawford, the member for the borough, said in the House of Commons in 1841, that there were

136 persons in Rochdale living on 6d a week, 200 living on 10d, 508 living on 1s. 855 living on 1s.6d, and 1,500 living on not more than 1s. 10d. a week. This was at a time of bad trade; but such conditions were becoming chronic, at any rate among the hand-loom weavers, and Rochdale was hungry, and hungrier than most of the Northern towns, at a time when^{1.} hunger was common enough throughout the new industrial areas.

It is not surprising that Rochdale became a key point for contact between Yorkshire and Lancashire in the Chartist agitation. Feargus O'Connor, whose headquarters were in Leeds, spoke in Rochdale on a number of occasions, and was indicted in 1840, after the Newport rising, for a speech which he had addressed to a Rochdale Chartist demonstration. Rochdale was also a focal point in the struggle for factory legislation and the ten-hour day.

In Rochdale, as indeed in the whole of the industrial North, in the decade following 1836, the Chartist Movement was inextricably bound up with the Poor Law struggle. Here it was hatred of the new Poor Law, above all else, that turned Chartism, with its purely political programme, into a mass movement of the working classes. Chartism was in reality

1. A Century of Co-operation - G. D. H. Cole. p.41..

a fundamental assertion of the right of the workers to certain basic standards of life. Though the Charter was silent on economic questions, it implied to Lancashire factory operatives reasonable wages and decent living conditions.

In Rochdale Chartism met the mood of the hour and became a formidable force. The leader of the movement here was James Taylor, who represented the town at the National Convention in 1839, and again at the National Conference in 1840. There were great torchlight meetings and processions in connection with his election as delegate in the Autumn of 1838; and the temper of the Rochdale Chartists appears to have run high. At the Convention, Taylor adopted a policy of moderation, and opposed the idea of a "Grand National Holiday" or strike, by which the Chartist leaders hoped to intimidate the Government into accepting the Charter. Circumstances defeated him, however, and Rochdale did, in fact, take part in the Great Strike of August 1842. Taylor, however, was no opportunist and he was arrested for his part in bringing about the strike. He was acquitted, and continued to play an active part in Rochdale politics and in the religious life of the town. He and James Wilkinson, who was one of the original Rochdale Pioneers, were among the leaders of the "Cookites", followers of Joseph Cooke, originally

a Wesleyan Methodist Minister who had been expelled by the Methodist Conference in 1806 on account of his unorthodox opinions. Cooke's followers built a new Chapel - Providence Chapel in the High Street - for him, where he continued to officiate until his death in 1811. After his death three young members of the congregations, James Taylor and two others (John Ashworth and James Wilkinson) continued his work. A dispute arose, and when a new minister was called, Taylor, assisted by his two friends, formed a rival Unitarian community. From this Unitarian body there came leaders in both the Chartist and the co-operative movement.

This brief outline of the background against which these men "The Rochdale Pioneers" began their co-operative trading activities indicates that Rochdale, like most other Northern towns, had been transformed out of all recognition by the advent of the factory system and of steam power. The peculiarity of Rochdale lay in the religious background against which the reforming movements played their part in this town. In its numerous sects and religious controversies it resembled modern California more than anything else. New religious groups were constantly arising, and among the dissenting congregations there were constant shifts, secessions, and foundations of new sects. A list is instructive:

- 1688 The Unitarians make their appearance.
- 1773 The Baptist Church was formed.
- 1782 The first Sunday School appeared.
- 1806 The Cookites or Methodist Unitarians.
- 1808 The Society of Friends Meeting House established.
- 1810. The Particular Baptists built a Chapel.
- 1811 The Countess of Huntingdon Connexion built St. Stephen's Church.
- 1814 The Methodist New Connexion formed a group.
- 1829 Roman Catholics built St. John's Church.
- 1820 St. James's (Two Anglican Churches built
- 1835 St. Clement's (out of the million pounds (allocated by Parliament for (the erection of Churches in (new Industrial Areas. (1)

This list is by no means complete, for in Rochdale all the sects seemed to find homes with great facility. (There was even to be found a little group of Owenite Socialists with their humane rationalism, and this group provided much of the original inspiration and membership of the "Equitable Pioneer Movement".) Doubtless this wide diversity of religious denominations arose from the uncertainty of life, and the unhappiness of the time, and represented attempts to escape from the grim and drab horizons of daily life. These dissenting chapels were largely built by the benefactions of well-to-do manufacturers.

In Rochdale there are clear evidences of the influence of Wesley. No part of the teaching of the founder of

1. List given in G. H. D. Cole - Ibid p. 54-55.

Methodism took a firmer grip than that which made it a part of a man's duty to God to achieve success in his calling; and the making of money came to be regarded as the test of this success. The Methodist employer, having made money according to the commercial standards of his day, sought to compound for the harshness of his methods by generous religious benefactions. The fact that he and his work-people attended the same place of worship served often to mitigate class antagonism. The workers who could not accept such association with their employers were driven to establish chapels of their own. At this period it was characteristic of small provincial towns like Rochdale that complete severance from religion involved too much isolation to be very popular. Any religion that held men in communion with their fellows seemed better than none, and only the few who could make a religion of Chartism and similar social faiths could bear to break away completely from the traditional methods of worship. In Manchester, severance from the Church was much more common, for community life was much more impersonal.

Early in 1844, a weavers' strike broke out and accelerated a movement which resulted in "The Rochdale Pioneer Store". Twenty-eight men met in August, 1844,

and decided to open a Co-operative store. There was nothing novel about this, for in Rochdale itself an earlier venture existed from 1833 to 1835. What was of unique value in this experiment was the fact that the Society issued a set of rules based on the aims and ideals of democracy. These rules, defined their objects in the following oft-quoted terms:-

"The objects and plans of this Society are to form arrangements for the pecuniary benefit and the improvement of the social and domestic conditions of its members, by raising a sufficient amount of capital in shares of one pound each, to bring into operation the following plans and arrangements:

- (1) The establishment of a Store for the sale of provisions, clothing, etc.
- (2) The building, purchasing, or erecting a number of houses in which these members, desiring to assist each other in improving their domestic and social condition, may reside.
- (3) To commence the manufacture of such articles as the Society may determine upon, for the employment of such members as may be without employment, or who may be suffering in consequence of repeated reductions in their wages.

- (4) As a further benefit and security to the members of this Society, the Society shall purchase or rent an estate, or estates of land, which shall be cultivated by the members who may be out of employment, or whose labour may be badly remunerated.
- (5) That, as soon as practicable, the Society shall proceed to arrange the powers of production, distribution, education and government, or in other words, to establish a self-supporting home colony of united interests, or assist other societies in establishing such colonies.
- (6) That, for the promotion of sobriety, a temperance hotel be opened in one of the Society's houses as soon as convenient.

This organisation so established was to be run on eight distinct principles, only two of which directly concern us - namely, the idea of open membership and that of religious and political neutrality. In these early affirmations can be discovered a curious blend of Chartism and militant Nonconformity. The idea of political and religious neutrality indicates that the membership was

made up of a mixture of Owenite Rationalists and members of the new Dissenting sects. This provision, of course, did not carry, in 1844, all the implications that such a statement would bear to-day. In the absence of a specific declaration of religious neutrality, the Pioneers would have been regarded by the upper and middle classes as "agnostics", or even as adherents of the militant atheism so enthusiastically advocated by Holyoake. Their aim was to make such accusations against the Society impossible.

Doubtless, in the early days, there was little expectation of attracting anyone from the more traditional religious denominations. Of the Pioneers themselves,¹ James Wilkinson was a Cookite, John Kershaw and John Scowcroft were Swedenborgians, and John Garside was a well-known Wesleyan local preacher. Although the Society was open, in theory, to people of all religious opinions, in its early days it was, in practice, only the unorthodox who joined it, and it was not until some years after its inception that members of the Anglican and Methodist Churches began to enrol in it. At the beginning, it was able to hold Sunday political discussions without opposition, but when the traditional type of Churchman began to join the ranks, that practice was carried on with much dissension.

1. See page 345 of this Thesis.

Political neutrality did not, of course, mean political impartiality. Conservatives were not invited to join, for in those days a Tory factory operative would have been regarded as a contradiction in terms. It was not even anticipated that there would be any response from the well-to-do traders who formed the backbone of the Liberal Party. The neutrality merely sought to give equal opportunity to the various types of working-class political groups, such as the Chartists, the Socialists, and the members of the Anti-Corn Law League. Although Richard Oastler and J. R. Stephens described themselves as Tories, to the workers they were Chartists, or Socialists, or "Ten Hour Men" - they were never thought of as Tories.

As the century advanced and the social situation changed, this religious and political neutrality came to have a different meaning. The working-class movements ceased to be identified in respectable society with infidelity or religious crankiness, and the recognised denominations ceased to outlaw Trade Unionism and Socialism. In the end, only Holyoake and a small group of followers represented the group which regarded Co-operative activity and rationalism as being indissolubly linked together. The Christian Churches, which earlier in the century had been divided from the

workers by a wide gulf, began to enter the life of the people. Religious neutrality came to mean the domination of the Co-operative movement largely by conscientious and convinced Nonconformists, and by members of the Anglican Church who had been brought to a sense of social responsibility by Maurice and Kingsley and Ludlow.

The principles and programme having been clearly outlined, it was essential to give the Society a name, to enable it to have such legal status as was then available to such a voluntary organisation. The choice of "Rochdale Equitable Pioneers" indicates the predominance of Owenite philosophy in the early stages, for "equitable" was one of Robert Owen's favourite words. The store was opened, to begin with, two evenings a week, and the committee met each week, not on the premises, but in the nearby "Weavers Arms". Early in 1845, however, they decided to open every evening, and a much more comprehensive selection of articles was bought as stock. The failure of the Rochdale Savings Bank in 1849 caused the membership to leap overnight from 140 to 390, and from that moment the venture never looked back. This bank-failure, which was a calamity to hundreds of thrifty members of the working-class, came as a godsend to the Co-operative Store. By 1850, the membership stood at 600, and the yearly cash-sales at over £13,000. After 1851, the Store was open all

day, and acquired a lease of the whole of the premises in Toad Lane.

This pioneer Society met with considerable hostility from the private traders. When Richard Cobden stood as Parliamentary candidate for the Borough in 1859, a whispering campaign sought to discredit him by linking his name with the Store. Cobden emphatically denied this, but it is a well-known fact that he and John Bright were always good friends to the leaders and had their support. With the disappearance of Chartism, there was a general rallying of the working-class opinion to the more radical wing of the Liberal Party. As membership of the Society increased, the Chartist and Owenite elements lost their predominant power - and though still affirming political neutrality, the Pioneers tended to become more and more identified with Liberalism in local affairs. This became so obvious that a Rochdale Conservative Co-operative Store was established, but experiments of this kind never became popular in the country as a whole.

In the fifties, the practical success of the movement was helped by the zeal with which the idealist aspect was preached by the Christian Socialists. As an organised movement, Christian Socialism lasted for no more than eleven years, beginning with the issue of "Politics for

the People" in 1848, under the immediate stimulus of the French Revolution of that year, and ending in 1859 when its leaders diverted their attention to the cause of popular education and the founding of a Working Men's College in London. The interest of the Christian Socialists in Co-operation was inspired by John Ludlow and Tom Hughes (the author of "Tom Brown's Schooldays"). Ludlow happened to be in Paris during the revolt of 1848, and was tremendously impressed by Louis Blanc's self-governing Producers' Association, and by the "National Workshops" set up under the auspices of the State. He fired Maurice and Kingsley with his own enthusiasm.

Thus the Christian Socialists became interested in the Co-operative Movement, mainly from the angle of Producers' Co-operation and, during the period of their activity in it, they gave most of their attention to the establishment of Working Men's Associations for Co-operative Production. These failed; but over the same period the Christian Socialists rendered signal service to the whole Co-operative Movement by helping to place on the Statute Book the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1852 - the law which for the first time gave Co-operative Societies effective legal protection for their funds.

Ludlow's return from Paris coincided with the fiasco on Kennington Common, and he found thousands of working men looking for a new social and political lead. A few days after this last demonstration of Chartism, the Christian Socialists placarded London with a manifesto written by Charles Kingsley, under the pseudonym of "A Working Parson". This made no mention of Co-operation, but did assure the workers that they had behind them the sympathy of a group of Christian leaders and affirmed that regret for the Charter was useless, for, without moral reformation, even the attainment of the six points would have accomplished very little. It ended with the injunction "Workers of England, be wise, and then you must be free, for you will be fit to be free".

In his "Centenary Book" of the Co-operative movement, written in 1944, G. H. D. Cole gives a vivid description of a visit paid by Ludlow to Lancashire in 1851, and shows that he found a great number and variety of stores in the county. Manchester, Liverpool, Bury, Bolton, Salford, Oldham and Stockport are all quoted as places having more than one type of store. In the meantime, the Christian Socialists had been joined in 1850 by Edward Vansittart Neale, a wealthy and enthusiastic

recruit who enabled them to open up a store in London. This was opened in Charlotte Street in the old Owenite headquarters. This same work has an excellent account of the effort and failure of the Christian Socialists to found Producers' Co-operation Associations. It is quite obvious that they embarked on the scheme with no knowledge that such ventures had been tried before, and that the road was strewn with many failures.

This Christian Socialist episode in the development of Workers' Co-operation is somewhat difficult to relate to the whole history of the movement. It sprang almost entirely from Ludlow's enthusiasm for French Co-operative ideas, and was exceedingly unpractical in its methods. But to these men the Co-operative Societies owe a tremendous debt. Not only did they secure for the societies legal status; they left behind a devoted group of individuals who integrated and gave continuity to the whole movement. The story of Co-operation in this country would read very differently if separated from the work of Thomas Hughes, Neale, and Ludlow, who eventually became the Registrar of Friendly Societies, and, in his later years, piloted the Movement through many legal difficulties. The Christian Socialists failed; in the type of society in which they made the effort they were

bound to fail, but none the less, they rendered in this field a great service to the workers of England.

CHAPTER XVI

Education in the Chartist Era

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Education might be described as a passion with the Chartists. Dissatisfied as they were with the social programme of the Churches in England, their criticism did not remain a merely negative attitude. In course of time they formulated a plan for the intellectual and social betterment of the community, in which the education of the masses came to occupy a foremost place. According to William Lovett the "raison d'etre" of Chartism was "to purify the heart and rectify the conduct of all, by knowledge, morality, and love of freedom.^I

It was at about the time of the first "Reform agitation" that the working-classes in Lancashire became aroused on the subject of education, and the vigorous persistent campaign for an Unstamped Press was a symptom of this desire. In this connection it is a point of interest that three of the six men appointed to draw up the Charter - Watson, Hetherington, and Cleave, had already become well-known and

I. W. Lovett and Collins - Chartism - p.9.

suffered imprisonment for the cause of a "free Press". In 1834, a group of Manchester business men ^I became interested in the educational question and proceeded to make an inquiry into conditions in the neighbouring districts. The area covered by the inquiry included Liverpool, Bolton, Bury, Ashton-under-Lyne, Salford and Stalybridge. ² Between 1834 and 1837, the results of these investigations were published in various reports, and from them it is possible to form a clear estimate of the opportunities for education open to working-class children at the time. The most striking facts brought to light by this inquiry were the inadequacy of the accommodation and the teaching provided, and the strenuous efforts made to remedy these conditions. The provision of sufficient day schools was an enormous undertaking, and at first efforts to provide schools were made alike by Nonconformists and Anglicans from their own resources.

Two names are inseparably connected with ecclesiastical efforts at education. At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Rev.

I. Known as the "Manchester Statistical Society".

2. J.L. & B. Hammond. "The Age of the Chartists", p. 168

Andrew Bell, a church of England clergyman, and Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker, invented, separately, new and similar systems of teaching. Both discovered that education could be greatly cheapened by the employment of child-labour; schoolmasters except as heads were superfluous; the brighter children could be used to teach the others. The system was much admired and copied by most educational reformers. "The Monthly Repository" of 1817 described the system with approval, and, in fact, it was, as this editor said, a great improvement on existing systems. It used the incentive of reward rather than punishment. Robert Aspland attended a demonstration by Joseph Lancaster in 1809, and reported enthusiastically; "His system is a blessing to the country and will prove such, it is to be hoped, to the world....He can find something in every youth's affections on which to lay hold."^I To-day the mechanical nature of the system appals educationists, but, in those days, the fact that it was mechanical was regarded as one of its virtues. The use of half-taught children to teach others produced an education as cheap as it was slipshod, but the cheapness of the system encouraged those who wished to

I. R.V. Holt. "The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England", p. 256.

extend education further.

Two Societies were founded to spread these new methods of education. "The Royal Lancastrian Association" was founded in 1808, and changed its name in 1814, to "The British and Foreign School Society". In 1811, the Church of England established "The National Society for promoting the Education of the Poor in the principles of the Established Church." These two societies practically controlled elementary education in England for the next two generations. The names of these societies still survive, for up and down the country the words "British School" and "National School" can still be seen cut into the walls of old school buildings. The National Society, as its full title made clear, existed to make good members of the Anglican Church, The British Schools were avowedly undenominational, being founded "to give no countenance to the peculiar doctrines of any sect, that it may include the aid of any persons professing to be Christians."

In the 1830's, the parents of a child in Manchester had the choice, in theory at least, of several types of school. In 84 out of the 86 Sunday-Schools in the city he would be taught to read after a fashion, and, in 10 of

these schools, he might learn writing too, but the process would be long and tedious. If daily study was intended he could attend one of the 230 notorious "Dames' Schools" run by people whose qualifications were negligible, if not non-existent. In such schools, the teacher very often combined the school with some kind of shop, and the pupils were left a great deal to their own devices. There were also so-called "Common Day Schools" run by men or women for the purpose of making a living. Sir James Kay Shuttleworth described these as "Adventure Schools" because they were maintained by "private Adventure teachers".^I Too often the teacher's qualification for the job was that of "unfitness for every other."

The Hammonds give a graphic account of the city's British and Foreign Society's School - known as the Manchester Lancastrian School.² Here an observer might see a thousand children, closely packed on benches, all being taught in one room, with only two masters and one mistress in charge. At first the noise would have been deafening, but soon he would have noticed that there was order and system in the apparent chaos, that the multitude obeyed

I. J. Kay Shuttleworth "Four Periods of Public Education" (1862) p. 104.

2 J.L.&B. Hammond Ibid p. 171 ff.

certain words and that each nine or ten boys was in charge of a monitor, who was teaching them a lesson from a board mounted at one end of the form. He would have noticed that school began and ended with a reading by the master and that the Bible was the only reading book.

Even with the help of the British and National Societies, the problem of providing a system of general education could not be solved by voluntary effort. Lord Brougham's figures of 1820 show that 3,500 parishes had unendowed schools, many of which consisted of nothing more than an old lady with a primer; and many had nothing at all. A much more ambitious attempt to clear the ground for action was made early in the life of the "First Reform Parliament", for as a result of the insistence Lord Ker's Parliament decided to take stock of the educational facilities then available.^I The task was put into the hands of John Rickman, who had already carried through a population census with marked success. He adopted the method of sending out 15,000 questionnaires to responsible people in every part of the country. From

I. May 24th., 1833.

the mass of information received, it was calculated that 1 in every 11 of the population attended some kind of day school, and 1 in 9 a Sunday School.¹ On careful investigation, however, the returns were found to be hopelessly inaccurate. The Manchester Statistical Society found that in Manchester, where the total school-going population was about 18,500, the Kerry returns omitted 181 schools with 8,646 scholars, while in Bury with 2,474 scholars, 19 schools with 861 scholars were omitted.² The fact that such a vast amount of information had been gathered was, still, in itself a notable advance. It became obvious at once, that a system of general education was too expensive to be met by a combination of private philanthropy and the payments made by parents. Some form of government assistance was essential, either through the rates or by direct grants.

There had now come the realisation that general education could be provided only if the cost were borne by the State. At the same time there came the realisation of certain factors involved in a general system paid for by the State. If the State bore the cost to a large extent

1. 1835 Abstract of Education Returns, Vol. III p. 1330.
 2. J.L. & B. Hammond - op. cit. p. 181.

it would control the policy. If it controlled the policy, the party which at any particular time controlled the State would be greatly tempted to use its control, not for educational, but for party or propaganda purposes. The temptation was hardly likely to be withstood, unless there was against it a wise and determined public opinion, and such public opinion did not exist in the early part of the nineteenth century. At this time, even geography was regarded as a dangerous subject, and schoolmasters were not allowed to hang up maps.

While the "Kerry Inquiry" was proceeding the Government took two important steps, which influenced elementary education for many years.

In the first place, they included in their Factory Act of 1833, provisions for the compulsory education of factory children. On paper, every child was obliged to attend school for two hours a day, and if a suitable school was not available, the Inspector was authorised "to establish or procure the establishment of such schools." As, however, no funds were provided, and as the relevant sections were carelessly drafted, these well-intentioned provisions were often a dead-letter, and when carried out conscientiously by employers, were a tax on industry. ^I Their second step

I. See Factory Inspectors' Reports for 184-3.

was to make a grant in aid of education. On Aug, 17th, 1833, they proposed that each year a sum of £20,000 should be divided between the two societies, the British and Foreign and the National. Before any grant was given, "at least half the sum required for the building of schools must be raised by subscription".^I In the next five years the National Society, as the wealthier and larger, received £69,700 and the British and Foreign School Society just over £35,000.²

Clearly, the State assistance to education meant also State assistance to dogmatic teaching. The National Society stood for this quite openly. Anglicans claimed that, since they were the National Church, they should control the national system of education. On the other hand, most Nonconformists were opposed to this claim and demanded simple Bible teaching, which, perhaps somewhat naively, they believed to be unsectarian. The controversy delayed for many years the provision of an adequate educational system. The position when Lord John Russell introduced the measure which set both sides on fire in 1839, was fairly easy to grasp. Parish rates and local responsibility would mean Church control,

I. J. Kay Shuttleworth op. cit. p. 235.

2. 1838 Committee of Education Report p.X.

and all advocates of a national system, as well as all Nonconformists rejected that. State control and State maintenance implied a secular system and all creeds rejected that.

On Feb. 12th, 1839, Lord John Russell, gave the first details of his new plan in Parliament.^I He proposed to set up by Order in Council a body of five persons, "for the consideration of all matters affecting the Education of the people". They were to have charge of any money voted for education, and one of their first cares would be the establishment of a Normal School (a Training College for Teachers). In a letter to a friend, Russell revealed great optimism regarding the outcome of his plan: "In the midst of these conflicting opinions, there is not practically that exclusiveness among the Church societies, nor that indifference to religion among those who exclude dogmatic instruction from the School, which their mutual accusations would lead bystanders to suppose. Much, therefore, may be effected by a temperate attention to the fair claims of the Established Church,² and the religious freedom sanctioned by law". His optimism was completely unfounded. When the committee

1. Hammond 3rd. series. XLV pp. 273 ff.

2. Letter to Lord Lansdown, quoted by J. Kay Shuttleworth in "Four Periods of Public Education p. 240.

began its work, it protested at once against the proposed establishing of a training college. The protest was based on the fact that the Normal College would include a model school, where future teachers would learn their profession by actual practice in teaching, and the instruction given would not be denominational.^I Further, the Committee declared its intention of abandoning the former practice of limiting the making of grants to schools of the two great religious societies. They resolved also to apply a portion of the funds at their disposal to the institution of a body of inspectors and the appointment of a secretary, and announced that, in future, no school would receive a grant which refused to conform to the rules laid down by the Committee and accept the permanent control of the State inspectors.

The Cabinet gave way, and abandoned the project of the Normal College, but a storm of protest swept the country over the new rules determining the conditions for State Aid. Now began that conflict between the Church of England and Nonconformity which was to be associated with all efforts at educational reform throughout the century. The fact that

I. Education Commission 1861. Appendix - See Vol. Vi. pp. 300-301 (F. Smith. Introd. Michael Sadler.)

a general system of education was at last created was due more than anything else to the untiring patience of James Kay Shuttleworth, the first Secretary appointed by the Committee.^I

In an effort to appease the intense religious feeling, the Government raised the Annual Grant from £20,000 to £30,000; but the five years' distribution between the two Societies had created vested interests, and the denomination-
alists refused to be placated. In a further effort to overcome hostility, the Committee issued regulations that the inspectors were not to interfere with religious instruction or with discipline, but were merely to collect facts and information,² and it was explained that exceptions to the usual division between the two Societies would be exceedingly rare. Applicants not connected with either Society would be asked to explain their objection to such a connection and to give the fullest particulars of the religious instruction provided.³ Even then their chances of success seemed meagre. Still the Anglican Church refused to accept the money and even by March 17th, 1840, had accepted only £5,300 out of almost £20,000 offered. In the summer of 1840, for all practical

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1. Life of Kay Shuttleworth, F. Smith (Introd, Michael Sadler)
 2. Life of Kay Shuttleworth - F. Smith p. 95.
 3. Minutes of Council of Education Dec. 3rd. 1839.

purposes, the Government gave way. The two Archbishops were put in charge of the appointment of inspectors to Church of England Schools, and were allowed to draw up instructions relating to the inspection of religious teaching.
I

But the Committee discovered that the Established Church opposition had been destroyed only at the expense of gaining for themselves the bitter hostility of the Nonconformists. From 1833 to 1839 the British Society had been technically on an equality with the Church, although owing to her greater wealth and activity, the Church and been given the lion's share of the annual grants. But the Concession to Anglicanism in 1840, put the National Society in a superior position. Matters came to a head, when an inspector (Mr. Tremepheere) who had visited British and Foreign Schools in the Metropolitan district, produced a report utterly condemning their methods. The irony of the situation lay in the fact that the inspection had been carried out at the request of the leaders of the Society itself. There began a long and bitter controversy between the Education Committee and the British and Foreign School Society.

Early in the session of 1843 - on February 28th - Lord Ashley delivered a long and powerful speech in the House of Commons on the ignorance, immorality, and infidelity of the manufacturing districts, and pleaded with the Government to take into instant and serious consideration the best means of securing for the working classes the benefits of a moral and religious education. As soon as Lord Ashley sat down, the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, announced that the Government had already agreed upon a scheme for the compulsory education of pauper children and children working in factories; and he gave an outline of Government proposals. He appealed to men of all parties and of all creeds to rise above their political and religious prejudices, and to unite on neutral ground to build up a scheme of national education.^I

But it was apparent that the intention of the Government was to create, largely at the public cost, a system of Church of England schools under the control of the clergy - schools in which no Dissenting teacher would have any chance of an appointment. The Bill which Sir James Graham laid before the House on March 7th, 1843, surpassed

the worst apprehensions¹ of the Dissenters. Not only were the clergy given virtual control of schools, but every child had to attend at least one service of the Established Church every Sunday unless the parent made a specific religious objection.^I Baptists, Congregationalists, and Roman Catholics were now joined by the Wesleyan Methodists, and a petition of protest against the Bill, containing two million signatures was presented to the House of Commons. Some concessions² were made and, in particular, opportunity was given to children of Dissenters to attend their own Chapels for religious instruction during three of the usual school hours during one day of the week.² By 1847,³ however, the Wesleyans had been won over by the Government.³

^b While the Churches were squabbling as to who should control education, the Chartists stood solidly for secular education. William Lovett expressed the opinion of many Chartists when he declared that the Churches were more interested in the brand of religion that was to be imparted to the children of the working classes than in the quality

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1. Parl. Debates (Hansard: T.S.) IXVII 422-444, I4II-I477.
 2. Parl. Debates (Hansard T.S.) LXVIII 1104-1118, 1110-1112
 3. See Minutes of Committee of Council for 1847.
 4. W. Lovett & Collins - Chartism p. 135.

of the instruction or the truthfulness of the knowledge. For several years Lovett was active in defence of this proposition. The London Working-men's Association, in giving birth to Chartism, had among its objects:-

- (a) To devise every possible means and to use every exertion to remove these cruel laws that prevent the free circulation of thought through the medium of a cheap and honest press.
- (b) To promote by all available means the education of the rising generation and the extirpation of these systems which tend to future slavery.

The Chartists stood for "the principle of national, secular, gratuitous, compulsory education."^I

From 1843 until 1846 the principle of voluntarism was advocated by the great majority of Dissenters. They held the view, with passionate sincerity, that according to the true theory of the functions of the State, no grants of public money for educational purposes can be justified; except of course, for the building and maintenance of schools for pauper and criminal children. When the Government proposed in 1846-7 a large extension of the grants, the Nonconformists opposed the Bill with great bitterness.²

I. R.G. Gammage - History of the Chartist Movement p. 371.
 2. Parl. Debates (Hansard: T.S.) XCI 1414-1418.

Though the Government proposals were carried by a large majority, the battle was not over, for, at the General Election in the summer of 1847, many Liberal candidates, who had voted for the extensions, were opposed by Dissenters.

It had become the settled conviction of a large number of Nonconformists that the whole scheme of assisting denominational schools by Parliamentary grants was necessarily inequitable in its operation. The denominational character of an aided school depended, not on the denominational preferences of the parents for whose children it was provided, but on the denominational preferences of the persons by whom the school was partly built and maintained. The children of a district were sold to the Church which was able and willing to find the funds to buy them. The scheme was open to another objection. It greatly intensified the denominational element in national education. Those Churches which cared most about teaching their own definite creed had a motive for establishing schools which had not ^{17/05} felt by churches which had no desire to make the day school an instrument for the propagation of a denominational creed.

But the Chartist idea of secular education found some support in the Nonconformist Churches. Some eminent men vigorously advocated the theory that the education of the people does not lie beyond the true province of the Government. This position was maintained with great energy by Dr. Vaughan of Lancashire Independent College.^I Many of the younger Dissenters were wholly dissatisfied with the theory that the State has no other function than to protect the subject against force and fraud. They had taken their degrees at the Dondon University, which was partly supported by a Parliamentary grant; they had no scruples to prevent them from looking at pictures in the National Gallery, or from working in the Reading-Room of the British Museum. They were quite clear that it was no part of the duty of the State to teach religion; but they were also quite clear that it was no necessary and permanent part of the duty of the Church to teach writing, reading and arithmetic. The Church had created hospitals, and had taught Europe to care for the sick; when the lesson was learnt, the Church had ceased to maintain hospitals of its own, and left their support and management to the general community. The Church had created schools for giving secular as well as religious instruction; but if

I. J. Kay Shuttleworth - op. cit. 27-29, 47-50 and notes.

the nation had learnt to care for education, the Church, liberated from a task which had been a severe strain on its resources, might leave to the nation the support and management of schools for giving secular instruction, and devote all its strength to the evangelisation and religious instruction of the people.

These considerations were powerfully enforced by the extreme difficulty of maintaining voluntary schools especially in country districts, in the presence of schools which were aided by the State. The Church of England, the wealthiest of the denominations, with an endowed clergy, received grants to enable it to build its schools, and grants to enable it to maintain them. The village Dissenters, few of them with a larger income than that of the village carpenter or agricultural labourer, unable at times even to maintain a minister on the smallest salary, would generally have found it difficult to build a school, even with the aid of a building grant, and still more difficult to make the school efficient, even with the aid of an annual grant for maintenance. Without the grants, no school was possible to them. Even in large towns the maintenance of efficient day schools, where the grants were refused, became an intolerable burden. Some congregations maintained the struggle; but

many more abandoned it and their schools were closed.

It was with this problem in mind that the Lancashire Public School Association was founded in Manchester in 1847. Its Purpose was to create a system of schools, supported by local rates, and managed by local committees elected by the ratepayers, for imparting secular instruction only, leaving religious instruction to be provided by parents and the Church.¹ Richard Cobden gave to the new movement his powerful support. In its great outlines it had the approval of Dr. Vaughan and other eminent Nonconformists leaders in the county. Several Bills, varying in their details, but constructed on the general principles of the Association, were submitted to Parliament, but they were all defeated. The "religious difficulty" seemed insuperable. In the debate on the Bill of 1850, Lord Arundel exclaimed, "The two armies are drawing up their forces, and the battle is now between religion and irreligion, the Church and infidelity, God and infidelity, and the reward for which they must contend is² Heaven or Hell",

The position of the Lancashire Unitarians in this religious conflict is difficult to determine, James Martin-

1. Francis Adams - Elementary School Contest pp. 151-152.

2. Parl. Debates (Hansard T.S.), CX. 450.

eau, the greatest Unitarian leader of the nineteenth century, was a young minister in Liverpool in the forties. He would have preferred a simple secular system of instruction, but realised that the temper of the people would have made it impossible to implement any Act of Parliament directed to that end. It was quite obvious that neither Roman Catholics, Anglicans nor Calvinists would accept such a system. Martineau disliked the orthodoxy of the other Nonconformist bodies more than the orthodoxy of the Anglicans, and so he preferred a system which would increase the influence of the Church, since the Church was under the wholesome control of the State. "For his own part, he would rather choose to increase the power of the Church of England which is under some check from the control of the State and the good sense of the representative power of the country, than he would extend the power of the Dissenters who did not appear to him to understand at all the principles of religious liberty." ^I

On the other hand a great number of Unitarians still advocated scriptural teaching. At Bolton, for instance, a public meeting was held in favour of popular and scriptural education, and a Committee was formed to procure subscriptions for the British School Society. ²

1. Manchester Guardian April 7th., 1847.

2. R.V. Holt - op. cit. p. 262.

The Unitarian paper, "The Inquirer", devoted many columns at this time to the education question, and to the sectarian and religious issues which were involved. It is clear from the editorials that Unitarians felt that, at all costs, an efficient method of giving all children some elementary education was long overdue.

It is also the case that in spite of the conflicts, the quality of the teaching slowly improved. In 1844, a Factory Act was passed by the provisions of which children of eight years and upwards attended half time at school, three full days a week, or three hours a day for six days. In this way the first effective step was taken towards universal education, but in this way also was established the half-time system which remained such a dark blot on English education down to the twentieth century.

It is not within the province of this book to pursue the sectarian warfare which accompanied the development of an educational system in the nineteenth century. The effect of the Government grants was revealed in the dwindling of the schools outside the authority of the two religious societies. Manchester provided probably the most extreme example of this change. Whereas in 1834-5 there were 409 Dame and Common Day Schools with 11,512

scholars, in 1852 there were only 126 of these schools with 4334 scholars. The children at National, British, and Denominational Schools meanwhile had gone up from 3,818 to 15,270.¹ Whereas at Ashton and Oldham in 1842, with a population of 10,000, there was no public day-school for working-class children, in 1846 there were twenty schools of this kind, with 3459 scholars.² But the private school dies hard, and in 1858 it was calculated that 33.9% of working-class scholars attended them. Nor, from contemporary accounts, does there seem any good reason to suppose that they had improved in their standards of teaching.

In the Chartist era the Churches were in perpetual conflict over this issue of education, and this warring spirit proved an almost insuperable obstacle to reform. Peel summed up the situation during a debate in the House of Commons on the 1847 Bill. "One day the Dissenters refuse their assent because they are afraid the Church will derive some advantage; on the next occasion the Church is opposed to any measure for fear of some recognition of the principle of Dissent. But in the meantime, while all these disputes go on, it is for us to ask ourselves, what is to become of the 300,000 persons who are added every year to the population?"³ It is

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1. Report of Manchester (and Salford) Education Committee 1852 pp. 23, 40 & 60.
 2. J.L. & B. Hammond op. cit. p. 208.
 3. House of Commons April 22nd. 1847.

significant that the few men of larger view in every denomination shared the Chartist aim of universal secular education and, had their voices been heeded, England might have led the whole of Europe in this field. The great number of cheap Chartist papers which sprang up in this era, made available to the people periodicals of remarkably high literary merit, at a time when the number of people able to read was increasing year by year. The purely educational effect of Chartist magazines and books was considerable, and through the medium of their pages, slowly but surely, the English working-man began to understand the forces contending for the privilege of instructing his children. It is tempting to speculate what might have happened if J.R. Stephens had taken up the task of advocating universal education with the zeal he applied to "Factory Reform". It is possible that the story of education throughout the century would now read quite differently, and that the emancipation of factory children would have been accomplished far more speedily and completely.

CHAPTER XVII

The Question of Temperance

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If education was a passion among the Chartists, there was another activity in which their interest ran it close; that was the cause of Temperance. When the London Working Men's Association was formed Lovett declared that they sought "to make the principles of democracy as respectable in practice as they were in theory, by excluding the drunken and immoral and those who drown their intellect amid the drunkenness of the pot-house"^I. Lest the members might give way to temptation, they avoided holding meetings at public houses, because "habits and associations are too often formed at these places which mar the domestic happiness and destroy the political usefulness of the millions."²

This temperance movement was a reaction against the intemperance arising from the ghastly conditions of life in the manufacturing centres immediately after the Industrial Revolution. Whole populations gathered and bred as a consequence of the urgent demand for hands which machine

I. Wm. Lovett - Life and struggles p. 94-5.
 2. Ibid p. 65.

production made; old social customs and forms dissolved, villages grew into towns; and agricultural families left the homes of generations to settle near the new mills, mines and works, where relays of wage-workers were used up in the ruthless profit-making process. No plan, no systematised provision, was made for housing, for recreation, even for sanitation. The workers were torn from the soil and herded in mushroom aggregations of brick boxes called "homes". Practically no education was provided, and it is not surprising that the people solaced their worn out frames and jaded nerves with bestial enjoyment of liquor drunk to excess.

After 1830 opportunities for doing this abounded, for in October of that year, the Beer Act was passed.^I This enactment rendered it possible for any householder to obtain an excise license to sell beer, provided that he paid a fee of two guineas and produced sureties for £20. Beershops sprang up in every town and city throughout the country and even labourers sought to add to their earnings by turning their miserable cottages into beer-houses. In the years 1830 to 1833 the number of persons brought before the magistrates for

I. II George IV and I William IV Cap. 64.

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drunkenness increased threefold. Furthermore, the first Reform Government inherited a legacy of riots and disorder, to which the prevalent drunkenness was a contributory cause; but it made no attempt to deal with this evil; apparently feeling that any effort at control would be regarded as an intolerable interference with personal liberty. Even so wise a reformer as William Cobbett, declared that any attempt to deal with morals lay outside the province of statesman - "There must be something left for the pulpit - there must be something left to the parents - there must be something left to the moral teacher."² Undoubtedly such a judgment represented the viewpoint of many supporters of the Whig Government. The problem was aggravated by the fact that many of the old public-houses, where spirits were sold, felt the competition of these new beer-shops so keenly that they opened dram shops, with separate entrances where small quantities were sold. In Manchester some dram shops would sell such minute quantities as a pennyworth of rum and a half-pennyworth of gin.³ On a Saturday evening some Manchester gin-shops served 400-500 people every hour. In

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1. Evidence before the House of Commons Committee on Sale of Beer - 1833 p. 246.
 2. House of Commons (Speech) May 27th. 1834.
 3. Committee for Sale of Beer. Report 1833 p. 152.

addition the new beershops rapidly created a large body of people whose whole capital was invested in the business and who were bitter in their opposition to any system of regulation.

Under J.S. Buckingham, a Select Committee met in the House of Commons during 1834, to consider all aspects of this problem of drunkenness. The most startling disclosure made when their report was published was that many witnesses who had been examined had been unable to suggest any other solution than that of "total prohibition".^I The Report did not make that a definite recommendation, but rather urged the Government to introduce "some general and comprehensive law, for the progressive diminution and ultimate suppression of all the existing facilities and means of intemperance, as the root and parent of almost every other vice."² As might have been expected, the Whig Government did nothing at all to implement this suggestion and indeed on its behalf Lord John Russell speedily informed the House of Commons that no legislation of this type was contemplated.

The first Chartist leaders were quick to realise that their campaign would have little chance of success unless

¹ J.L. & B. Hammond - Op. cit. p. 160.

² J.L. & B. Hammond Op. cit. p. 160-161.

they could release their followers from the demoralising effects of the drink habit. The time and energy expended, and the money wasted on drink must always be an insuperable¹ obstacle to an effective campaign for political rights. Not only that, but continued excess in drinking habits would give weight to the contention of the upper classes that the workers were unfitted for the exercise of a vote. The Chartist magazines also put forward a rather less obvious reason for abstinence, namely that, in indulging so freely in alcohol, the working-men, through payment of excise² duties, were helping to maintain the status quo. "The Reformers' Almanac" suggested that complete abstinence by the working-man would so reduce the income of the Treasury³ that the Government would find it impossible to carry on. Nor was this view confined merely to Chartist supporters, for Disraeli makes his Chartist working-man say "We shall never get our rights, till we leave off consuming excisable⁴ articles."

It is this sense of the far-reaching effects of the

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1. English Chartist Circular - Many references e.g. p.6, 23, 35, 46. Wm. Lovett - Life and Struggles p. 57.
 2. Chartist Circular p. 40 & 42.
 3. Reformers Almanac p. 235.
 4. Disraeli - Sybil p. 115.

drinking-habit among the working-men which accounts for the fact that, though reformers achieved very little in Parliament, a considerable movement in support of Temperance sprang into being. The first Temperance Society in England was started in Bradford in February, 1830, by Henry Forbes, a local merchant. This was followed, in 1832, by the founding in Preston of one of the most famous of all temperance organisations. This association was started by thirty-three men, of whom seven signed the pledge, and the formula associated with all "Band of Hope" meetings was born. The leader of this organisation was Joseph Livesey - a cheese-factor - who had educated himself while working at a loom. They were all fired with a great zeal, and by their efforts, Preston came to be known as "the Jerusalem of Teetotalers". Livesey himself summed up their enthusiasm most eloquently - "They felt that they had discovered a remedy for the greatest curse that the world had to endure, It was like the discovery of the gold diggings; crowds rushed in to gain the prize; and for the first few years the meetings were crowded, and we had an array of reformed drunkards, not a few of them speakers, such as we had never seen before."

During the early stages of the movement, there was considerable opposition between the total abstainers and the temperance advocates. In the end the societies sponsored by Livesey became total abstinence societies, and, in so doing, narrowed the area of their influence. To many of the Churches this insistence on teetotalism smacked of fanaticism and was vigorously opposed. This opposition was not confined to one denomination, though the Wesleyan Methodists were the most bitter and persistent in their hostility. Though the parent body of Methodism took up this attitude, her offshoots, like the Bible Christians and the Primitive Methodists, were, in the main, friendly to the movement, and allowed the use of their premises for meetings. The opposition of Wesleyan Methodism culminated in the passing of three pertinent resolutions at the Manchester Conference in 1841.

(1) Throughout the Connexion no unfermented wines were to be used in the administration of the Sacrament.

(2) No Wesleyan Chapel should be lent for meetings of societies of total abstainers.

(3) No preacher was allowed to advocate teetotalism in another circuit without the consent of the superintendent of that circuit.

For their part, the Total Abstinence societies hastened to point out that the basement of the Wesleyan Centenary Hall in London was let to a wine and spirit dealer, and that the attitude of Wesleyan Methodists was dictated by vested interests within the Conference. There were, however, many teetotallers inside the denomination. They formed their own societies, and frankly ignored the rules.^I

Among the Chartist leaders Henry Vincent was the most successful advocate of total abstinence, and, during his imprisonment, conceived the idea of establishing a Chartist Teetotal Society in every village, town and city.²

Noted for his power as an orator, Vincent toured the country, making passionate endeavours to put this plan into effect - and he regarded it as an essential foundation for the success of the Chartist agitation. In this work he was ably supported by Thomas Cooper who scorned all ideas of temperance and insisted that only complete abstinence would suffice.

The indifference of Wesleyan Methodism to the ravages of the liquor trade in the 1830's and 1840's is one of the

1. J.L. & B Hammond - The Age of the Chartists pp. 165-166.
2. Chartist Circular p. 35.

most surprising attitudes taken up by the Society. In almost everything, the Wesleyans showed a slavish regard for the ideas of their founder, but in this particular matter, they went in direct opposition to his teaching. In his sermon on "The Use of Money", John Wesley very clearly and bluntly condemned the Drink Trade: "we may not sell anything which tends to impair health. Such is evidently all that liquid fires, commonly called drams or spirituous liquors.....Those who prepare and sell them only for medicine may keep their conscience clear. But who are they who prepare them and sell them only for this end? Do you know ten such distillers in England? Then excuse them. But all who sell in the common way, to any who will buy, are poisoners general. They murder His Majesty's subjects wholesale; neither do they ever pity or spare. They drive them to hell like sheep; and what is their gain? - is it not the blood of these men? Who would envy them their large estates and sumptuous palaces? A curse is in the midst of them...." ^I It is clear from his collected works that this relentless opposition to the

liquor traffic was neither accidental nor sporadic, but held a crucial place in Wesley's teaching. He regarded the drink trade as an enemy of all progress and true liberty. On one occasion he asked, "Why is food so dear?" and gives the answer. "The grand cause is because such immense quantities of corn are continually consumed in distilling..... Nearly half of the barley produced in the Kingdom every year is consumed, not in so harmless a way as throwing it into the sea, but by converting it into deadly poison, poison that naturally destroys not only the strength and life but also the morals of our countrymen."^I

But perhaps the most pertinent evidence of all is that in the "Rules of the Society of the People called Methodists", we read, "It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire for salvation first, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind; especially that which is generally that which is generally practised. Such is.....Drunkenness, buying or selling spirituous liquors or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity."² Even in this moral field, where Chartism might legitimately have anticipated the support

1. Thoughts on Present Scarcity of Provisions (1775) Sermon.
 2. See Section 4 of "Methodist Rules".

of Wesleyanism, it did not gain it. In his book "England before and after Wesley", Dr. Bready who is not likely to underrate the Methodist contribution to social progress, passes from Wesleyan Temperance Zeal in 1831 to its attitude in 1853, in a single-line - from which it may be inferred that, during the whole of the Chartist period, there was no organised Wesleyan protest against the Drink Trade.^I

The record of the Congregationalists in this respect is no better: and the Union reports of the 1830's contain no reference to the evils of the beershops. Two of the American visitors to the Union in 1835, criticised the Independents for taking so small a part in Temperance propaganda, and especially for being so little in evidence at a meeting of the British and Foreign Temperance Society which they had attended. According to their report, the only religious bodies in evidence at this meeting were the Quakers and the Anglicans. Two practices also pained the Americans, "the free use of stimulating liquors" at public meetings, decanters of wine being on the table for the use of the speakers, and the widespread custom of

I. F. Bready - England before and after Wesley p. 413.

offering wine to the preacher on his descent from the pulpit. In reply, it was urged that more Independents were allied to the Temperance Society than was generally supposed, and that others were only held back in reaction from the extravagances of "Teetotalism".^I

In his history of Congregationalism, Albert Peel quotes the actual reply which was given to this charge:-

"To banish the 'fruit of the vine' from the table of the Lord, and to forbid 'such as be faint' to drink of it, appears to many so contrary to reason and scripture, that they stand aloof from operations which terminate in such conclusions"

The use of wine as a stimulant, preparatory to any sacred service, is, in our judgment, like kindling strange fire for the altars of God; but we must own that we do not see the moral evil of a man relieving the exhaustion which public speaking has occasioned by the use of wine. On physical grounds it may be, however, expedient to employ a less exciting beverage, but we are not prepared to submit to censure for the temperate use of that which we regard to be one of the choice blessings of a beneficent Creator."²

Clearly many Congregationalists regarded a pledge of

1. These Hundred Years (1831-1931) Albert Peel.

2. Peel - Ibid pp. 106-7.

abstinence as "unscriptural, and likely to ensnare its subjects and to lead, if fully carried out to monkish austerities." On a Temperance advocate writing to explain the objects of the Society and the advantage of abstinence, the Editor of the "Congregational Magazine" (1836) thus brings down the heavy editorial hammer:

"We believe that "Total abstinence" - for it seems that its friends are now ashamed of their own barbarous term, 'Teetotalism' - has appeared to many fanatical and absurd." I

Amid such obvious divisions of opinion, it is easy to understand why total abstinence was not mentioned in the Union assemblies. Indeed, up to the early thirties, the only trace of a social conscience to be observed in the Union's proceedings is in reference to slavery. First the preaching of the Gospel, second, the securing of religious freedom - on these the aims of the Independents were concentrated, and they had not yet felt the call to the struggle for the remedying of social ills.

In 1840, one of the Congregational leaders advised the temperance advocate "to dwell principally, if not exclusively, on the moral elements of the question" and to cease to

I. Ibid p. 107.

impeach the motives of their neighbours." ^I As in the case of Wesleyan Methodism the idea of total abstinence touched many Congregational business men, in their financial operations. From 1840 to 1860, the question seems to have been dormant in Congregational circles.

After 1841, the subject seems to have lost its importance in Chartist propaganda and the number of Chartist teetotallers declined rapidly. Undoubtedly Vincent and his followers, however, contributed something of real value to the cause of Temperance, and to the uplifting of the working-classes. After 1841, the situation began to improve. In 1839, by a special Police Act, all places in London for the sale of intoxicating liquor were ordered to be closed from midnight on Saturday till one o'clock on Sunday. Liverpool followed in 1842, and Manchester a few years later, and in 1848 Sunday morning closing was made compulsory for the whole of England. ² Furthermore, though total abstinence ceased to figure on the Chartist platform, it still retained the loyal support of many working-men. Giving evidence in 1852, before a select Committee on Public Houses, Mr. Bishop, the leader of the Liverpool Mission,

1. Peel Ibid. p. 280.

2. II & 12 V^{ol}ct. Cap. 49.

declared that temperance societies were mainly supported by operatives. Here and there, local clergy and ministers ~~at~~ supported them; but in the main they conducted their own affairs and paid their own bills. Such movements did much to restore a sense of respectability and of the values of life to working-men.

CHAPTER XVIII

Christian Socialism after 1848

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It must always remain an open question what would have been the fate of the Chartist Movement if it had succeeded in enlisting the vast political and social influence of the Churches. There is, however, undeniable evidence that the Churches were, in the main, supported by the middle-class, and even so ^sintly a pastor as Robertson of Brighton had to confess that all his faithful members came from that class. ^I The "Church of England Magazine" declared with pride, "Amidst the reports of infidelity reigning it is satisfactory to find our middle-class so little affected by the plausibilities of false speculation... It is on the religious activity of the middle classes that we must rely for the most effective checks to the evils ² arising from our highly artificial state of society." Edward Miall, the most discerning writer among the Nonconformists, declared that Christian witness in England was "essentially the Christianity developed in a middle class

I. Brooke - "Life and Letters of F.W. Robertson", p. 110.
 2. The Church of England Magazine Vol. XXIII p. 20 (July 20th., 1847).

soil", and, as such, "fast-decaying and void of effeciency." ^I

In the first half of the nineteenth century, working-men found a substitute for the religious enthusiasm of the Evangelical period, in reforming clubs, Chartist gatherings, Trade Unions, and political debating circles. Nor did the bitter attitude of Church publications help to heal the breach which had developed between religious and secular organisations. The Chartist workers were accused of sedition ² and blasphemy, and one writer described them as "Republicans, Infidels, Sabbath-breakers and Blasphemers, who are unhappily a curse to themselves, a curse to their fellow countrymen, and a curse to the land that owns them". ³ The stock argument, that the Chartist Movement consisted of a discontented company of infidels, was constantly brought to the attention of the middle-classes, who were only too willing to believe it.

The actual position of a great number of the Chartists, was probably that of William Lovett. On his admission to prison, he was asked by the Chaplain what his religion was, and he replied that he was "Of that religion which Christ

1. British Critic Vol. 28. (1840) p. 346.

2. The People Vol. I p. 333.

3. The Real Chartist by C.L. p. 13. (4 edition London 1848)

taught, and which very few in authority practice, if he might judge by their conduct." ¹ A Chartist paper summed up the same argument on a more general basis. "If one thing is more certain than another, it is this, that it is the duty of Christians to labour for the welfare of their fellow-man". ² The Parliamentary grants to build Churches made little impression on the Chartists, who felt that the primary need was not buildings, but an "increase in pure, practical, undefiled religion, in which Church services became but a means to an end." ³ Along such lines of thought, thousands of working men had come to regard "Chartism as divine and therefore ordained of God." ⁴

If we are able to survey this period with the proofs of the necessity of collective action, and the evidence of the failure of organised religion before our eyes; then we find the attitude of the Churches hard to understand. We can scarcely believe that laissez-faire could ever have commanded the support of the country - or even of individuals unless they were blinded by self-interest: we can scarcely realise the horror with which State-interference was

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1. Wm. Lovett - Life and Struggles p. 35
 2. The People pp. 19 & 20
 3. Chartist Circular. Preface IV. pp. 5, 32, 197.
 4. Livesey's Moral Reformer. p. 133

regarded by men of all classes, parties and creeds. But the fact remains that for the time individual liberty, however gross its abuses, seemed synonymous with progress, and the extension of governmental powers with reaction.

The Christian reformers of the nineteenth century met bitter opposition from both great parties in the Church of England. The Tractarians stressed membership of the Church, observance of discipline, and sacramental communion with Christ, just as keenly as the Evangelicals advocated conversion, puritanical strictness, and ecstatic consciousness of Christ's presence. They were equally uninterested in man's social corporate relationships and responsibilities, and, apparently, equally unaware of those social sins which the individual shares in, but cannot personally cure. Of the social righteousness which flows from the awakening of the common conscience, they knew little or nothing.

The Chartist agitation, so far as its direct political object was concerned, had no effect save to consolidate the hostility of the ruling classes to reform. The Chartists were almost certainly mistaken in their selection of the political rather than the social or industrial sphere as their field of operations. They failed to realise that much preparatory work was necessary before they could hope to attain the franchise, and that it would be a better policy

to concentrate on practical measures of industrial reform, than to attempt to overthrow the existing system by direct assault. What is more important is that they exaggerated the probable effects of the Charter, if it had, in fact, eventually become law. The establishing of social righteousness by the passing of laws has always been an attractive dream, although history shows that generally, legislation, unsupported by public opinion and unaccompanied by moral sanctions, is foredoomed to failure. The Charter could have been passed only by violence and revolution. If it had been forced upon the country, so long as the educated classes were in the grip of a reactionary economic and social theory, and so long as the mass of the people were devoid of any constructive programme, and untried in all corporate action, its acceptance could have been nothing less than disastrous. The real success of Chartism was that, indirectly, it aroused misgivings among the thoughtful, revealed that all was not well with existing society, and directed the attention of the public towards the evils of the time.

Among the first and most powerful of the champions of social righteousness was the group of men who are usually regarded as the founders of Christian Socialism. In a sense, it is true to say that these four men (J.M. Ludlow, F.D.

Maurice, C. Kingsley, and C.B. Mansfield) owed their inspiration to Carlyle and their opportunity to the Chartists. The Chartist Demonstration of April 10th, 1848, was fruitless in many respects, but it gave birth to Christian Socialism. On that day Kingsley and Ludlow met the remnants of the mass meeting on Kennington Common, trudging homewards disconsolately through the rain. Having heard the news of the fiasco, they called on Maurice and discussed the situation with him. That night they determined to act. Kingsley wrote next day, "Maurice is in great excitement. I was up till four this morning, writing placards under Maurice's auspices.....We are to bring out a new set of real 'Tracts for the Times' addressed to the higher orders. Maurice is determined to make a decisive move. He says, 'If the Oxford Tracts did wonders, why should not we ?'"

The words "epoch-making" applied to this event is well justified, for it was the first social manifesto of the Church of England in the new industrial age. The Established Church had made its first public act of atonement for many years of class-prejudice and opposition to all working-class aspirations.

~~I. L. Brentano~~ — "~~Die Christlich-Soziale Bewegung~~" p.28.

*Charles Kingsley; his Letters and Memories of his Life.
(Edited by his wife) N.E. 1885-1886.*

On May 6th, 1848, there appeared the first copy of a Christian Socialist Magazine "Politics for the People"^I Altogether only seventeen members appeared, and in three months the paper ceased publication. The printer feared that the revolutionary tone of the newspaper was damaging his connection, and finally refused to carry on the venture. Three years later Ludlow comments upon this failure. "They had the satisfaction of finding themselves abused on all sides. By Chartist contemporaries.....by High Church newspapers shocked at their dangerous Radicalism. They failed, but with words of hope upon their lips, encouraging others to take up the fight in which they had been defeated, and conquer in it."

The modern reader is astonished to discover that the articles in these papers were regarded as so violent and revolutionary. In fact familiarity with the horrors of the time - as revealed in references from such standard works as "The Condition of the Working Classes in England" (Engels), "Das Kapital" (Marx), those of G.D.H. Cole and the Hammonds and the sociological works of Kingsley - gives the impression that the policy of the paper was one of studied moderation. Though Chartism was discussed in some

I. Christian Socialist Jan 4th, 1851 - Bound copy Vol I. p. 73.

detail, the aim of all the articles was to warn the workers against any appearance of violent or hasty action. For our purpose the most interesting contribution was a series of three "Letters to the Chartists", written by Charles Kingsley, under the name of "Parson Lot". These letters were attacked as the most dangerous articles in the paper, though in fact, their main object was to emphasise the peril of mistaking false for true freedom, and of preferring immediate material to ultimate spiritual well-being. For example, in the first letter, Kingsley had written, "God will only reform society on condition of our reforming every man his own self - while the devil is quite ready to help us to mend the laws and the Parliament, earth and heaven, without ever starting such an impertinent and personal request." ^I Monster meetings, physical violence, hasty judgments, the tendency to ignore the goodwill of some members of the upper classes, and to mistake the ignorance of the privileged regarding the poor for indifference - all these symptoms of impatience are condemned. Even Ludlow, the leader, the most progressive of all the contributors, is cautious, even academic, in his treatment of social abuses. The whole publication breathes a lofty idealism, and it is hard to find anything in it

which could nowadays be called revolutionary. The seventeen numbers of "Politics for the People" were, in effect, a declaration by a group of Anglicans, of their revolt against aloofness and apathy, and an announcement that some members of the Communion were prepared to take action on behalf of the workers when an opportunity occurred.

While he was thus inculcating a spirit of patience among the working-classes, Kingsley was writing his first novel, "Yeasi", the most sympathetic and accurate sketch of the Victorian agricultural labourer that we possess. It came out monthly in Fraser's Magazine; and we may look upon it as stating pretty clearly Kingsley's views on social questions at the epoch. His attitude on the rights of the masses of the people may be gathered from this speech of his hero Lancelot Smith. "If a man living in civilised society has one right which he can demand, it is this, that the State which exists by his labour shall enable him to develop, or at least not to hinder his developing, his whole faculties to the very utmost, however lofty that may be. While a man who might be an author remains a spade-drudge, or a journeyman, while he has capacities for a master, while any man able to rise in life remains by social circumstances lower than he is willing to place himself, that

man has a right to complain of the State's injustice and neglect." And again, "It did strike him that the few might possibly be made for the many, and not the many for the few, and that property was made for man, and not man for property."

Coming from a clergyman of the Established Church, such a definition of the function of society, was received in many quarters with anger, and regarded as setting a dangerous precedent. The public at large treated the reformers with icy scorn, or indifference; their fellow-Churchmen met them with insinuations against their orthodoxy; and, worst of all, the very workers for whom they were incurring so much ill-will, met their advances with distrust.

By 1851 the Christian Socialists as a body had attracted considerable attention. The year 1849 was a cholera year, in London and in the country; and Kingsley worked incessantly in both town and country to promote the cause of sanitary reform, to provide at least pure water and fresh air for the people. All the time he was busy producing his novel, "Alton Locke" and it was published in 1850. This was an indictment of the "sweat-shops" especially those in the tailoring trade, and appeared when his tract, "Cheap Clothes and Nasty" (one of the 'Parson Lat' articles), - an attack

on the same abuse), had become famous, and Maurice, helped by other London clergymen, organised, in 1851, a series of lectures and sermons on social questions. Kingsley was, naturally invited to join in the series, and arranged to give a sermon on "The Message of the Church to the Labouring Men". The sermon was given with the full permission of the incumbent (a Mr. Drew) and on its delivery was listened to with profound attention by a large congregation. On this occasion Kingsley appeared to have been more outspoken than usual, for he indicts the Church of his time in these words, "I assert that the business for which God sends a Christian priest into a Christian nation is to preach and practise liberty, equality and brotherhood in the fullest, deepest, widest, simplest, meaning of these great words; that in so far as he ~~do~~ does, he is a true priest, doing his Lord's will, and with his Lord's blessing on him.

All systems of society which favour the accumulation of wealth in a few hands, which oust the masses from the soil which their forefathers possessed of old, which reduce them to the level of serfs and day-labourers, living on wages and on alms, which crush them down with debt or in any wise degrade and enslave them, or deny them a permanent stake in the Commonwealth, are contrary to the Kingdom of God

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which Jesus proclaimed."

No sooner had this sermon ended than the incumbent of the Church in which it was preached, stood up and declared that, while he agreed with much that had been said, it was his duty to add that he believed much of it to be dangerous and untrue. Once sounded, the note of opposition soon became louder and louder, and Kingsley was derided as "The Apostle of Socialism". The Bishop of London, without acquainting himself with all the facts, forbade him to preach in London.

2

What was undoubtedly the greatest Chartist novel, was published by Kingsley anonymously under the title "Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet; An Autobiography", Carlyle having persuaded his own publishers, Chapman and Hall, to undertake the work. The publication of this novel caused a sensation, for since the stirring events over the whole of Europe in 1848, the consciences of many discerning people had become more highly sensitive to social evil and more skilful in understanding the challenge. The measure of its influence may be gauged by the violence and rapidity of the attacks which were showered upon it. The "Edinburgh Review", the

I. Quoted by H. de B. Gibbins "English Social Reformers pp. 169-170.

2. Idem. p. 170

3 C.E. Raven - Christian Socialism (1919) p. 168.

most influential of all periodicals, devoted the first thirty-three pages of its issue to an article by William Rathbone Grey on "English Socialism and Communistic Associations". In this article Grey took "Alton Locke" as a background for a stirring defence of the policy of laissez-faire and criticised the author for using fiction as a medium of violent and indiscriminate attacks on the existing order.^I Yet, in his condemnation, Grey probably quite unwittingly brought the Christian Socialists to the notice of a wide public, for a large part of his article is devoted to their activities. Ludlow regarded this review as "far more favourable than might have been expected," and indeed, the criticism of the "Edinburgh Review" compares favourably with that of other magazines - for example "Fraser's Magazine", (which had published "Yeasi" in monthly instalments and therefore should have been aware of the identity of the author) after quoting from the novel somewhat extensively, declared that, "if the book is to be regarded as a protest against society, we are bound to say society has no great reason to be uneasy."² Blackwood's criticised it fiercely as "a barefaced and impudent assumption of a

I. Edinburgh Review XCIII pp. 1-33. Repeated in Grey's Essays in Political and Social Science I. pp. 458-504.
 2. Fraser's Magazine XLII pp. 567-585. (especially p. 578)

specific profession by a person who know no more about tailoring or 'slop-selling' than he has learnt from certain letters in the Morning Chronicle", but nevertheless found it necessary to devote thirty-six columns to the discussion of what it sums up as "a book which exhibits in many passages marks of genius, but which, as a whole, is so preposterously absurd, as rather to excite ridicule than to move sympathy." ^I The "Quarterly Review", at the beginning, was discreetly silent, but finally, in September, 1851, produced a bitter attack on King ¹ and Maurice, in an article, entitled "Revolutionary Literature". Here the writer, J.W. Croker, declared that the writer of "Alton Locke" was preaching the doctrines of the French Revolutionaries under the specious guise of Christian Socialism. ²

The violence and weight of these attacks made the author famous almost overnight, and made the name Christian Socialism known to all educated people and, indeed, caused the ideals of these reformers to be ever more widely discussed and studied. "Alton Locke" is much more than an interesting social novel; it represents one of the great formative agencies in the life of the English people. Though his

1. Blackwood's Magazine Vol. LXVIII pp. 5593 and 609.
 2. Quarterly Review September 1851. pp. 491-543.

detractors could, and did, sneer over the fallacies of Kingsley's economics, and the injustice of his attacks on society, once he had revealed to them the horrors of competitive industrialism in all its nakedness, they could not deny that his presentation of the facts was basically true. Though they refused to accept Kingsley's remedy, a new public opinion created by the novel, compelled them to investigate, and sometimes to put right, the conditions described.

Throughout this period the Christian Socialists continued the attempt, initiated by the shortlived "Politics for the People", to keep up a regular means of communication with the people. In 1850, seven "Tracts for the Times" were reprinted, for Maurice never forgot his early determination to copy the method of the leaders of the Oxford Movement. The first tract was published on February 19th, 1850, and was followed by the others at regular intervals over the succeeding nine months. The Tracts were:

- (1) Dialogue - between Somebody (a person of respectability) and Nobody (the writer) - by F.D. Maurice.
- (2) History of the Working Tailors Association - by T. Hughes.
- (3) What Christian Socialism has to do with the question at present agitating the Church, (Discusses the "Gorham Controversy" on baptismal regeneration, then exciting the orthodox). - by F.D. Maurice.

- (4) The Working Association of Paris - J.M. Ludlow.
- (5) The Society for Promoting Working-men's Associations
by J.M. Ludlow and C. Sully (first Secretary of/Christ-
ian Socialists) the
- (6) Prevailing Idolatries or hints for political economists
by J.M. Ludlow.
- (7) Dialogue between A. & B., two clergymen, on the doctrine
of circumstances, by F.D. Maurice. (Here the writer deals
with the ideas and work of Robert Owen) I

A year later Maurice published number 8 of the series
under the title, "A Clergymen's answer to the question ¹On
what grounds can you associate with men generally ?" ²

The extent of the circulation of these Tracts was indic-
ated by Ludlow when he wrote, "The Tracts have been dirculated
to the extent of thousands and have been fa-vourably notified
in the most unforeseen quarters by men perhaps, whose can-
dour their authors were presumptuous enough to distrust. ³

The tracts were nearly all topical but the group speed-
ily realised that they could not be an effective substitute
far a regular peroidical. By this time the Society was
organised and began to link itself up more and more with Co-
operative experiments in different parts of the country;
and the need of a systematic channel of information became

- 1. These Tracts are among Funnivall's papers in the British
Museum (Vol. I. nos. 2-8).
- 2. A little known Tract - but the library of the Working Men's
College contains a copy. -
- 3. Christian Socialist I., p. 74. (Jan. 1851)

increasingly urgent. , Accordingly, under the editorial guidance of Ludlow, the first number of the "Christian Socialist, a Journal of Association conducted by several / of the Promoters of the London Working Men's Associations" appeared on Saturday, Nov. 2nd., 1850. Like the earlier magazine, it was sold for a penny, and was, in fact, a great improvement on "Politics for the People". By this time, the members of the group had a much clearer idea of what they hoped to achieve, and Ludlow thus defines their aims in the first issue: "The general object is to diffuse the principles of co-operation as the practical application of Christianity to the purposes of trade and industry." Ludlow goes on to declare that the paper will deal with the economics of trade, education, land-tenure, poverty and the poor-laws, social legislation, finance and Church reform.^I Each week, there was inserted a Gazette, containing a record of the doings of the various Associations in London and the Provinces. The circulation reached fifteen hundred copies almost at once, and in less than a year was over three thousand.² It is interesting to glance through the list of contributors; for it reveals a wide variety of talent drawn

1. Article "Our Principles"- collected copies of Christian Socialist pp. 2-3.

2. Kingsley's Life and Letters I. p. 246. (Letter of Dec.4th 1851.).

from many fields. For example, J.A. Froude contributed¹ an essay on the socialistic principles of the Essenes, while Mrs. Gaskell (authoress of "Mary Barton") wrote two harrowing stories "The Sexton's Hero" and "Christmas² Storms and Sunshine".

Kingsley was a reliable supporter, his most important contribution being a series of articles on "Bible Politics", in which he attacked³ the belief that "the Bible is the book which, above all others, supports priestcraft, superstition, and tyranny.". But probably the most interesting items in the paper are to be found in the Free Correspondence columns. In one number there appeared an article pleading⁴ for the "Admission of Clergymen to Parliament" and in another, a rhyme entitled "A Plea for Cursing"⁵. Maurice wrote regularly, his most interesting work being a serial, "The Experiences of Thomas Bradfoot, schoolmaster". There were many well-known contributors, amongst them the brothers Furnivall, Hughes and Ludlow, to whom was entrusted the task of defending the movement against the baggage of misrepresentation and calumny which it faced in the secular

1. Christian Socialist Op. cit. p. 14.

2. Idem p. 159, 167, 175, 183, 194, 199.

3. Christian Socialist I. p. 9.

4. The Rev. P. Bland - Christian Socialist I. p. 62.

5. Idem. p. 30. Poe, by J.B. Leno.

and religious press. Perhaps the most valuable feature of all was a resumé given in weekly instalment in Numbers 2-24 of the evidence before the Slaney Committee in the House of Commons, set up to report upon "Investments for the Savings of the Middle and Working Classes." Slaney had taken up this question on the advice and under the direction of the Christian Socialists.^I At the end of twenty-four weeks the publisher became alarmed at the public attitude and discontinued publication.

On July 15th 1851, the first copy of a new volume of the paper was issued under the direction of another publisher, but the general scope and treatment remained the same. Several new contributors appeared, including Robert Owen, who wrote a long letter in defence of his determinist philosophy in its application to social reform. Towards the end of 1851, however, the guarantors made it clear that they could not afford to subsidise the venture indefinitely, and in 1852 the paper had a chequered career. The last number appeared on June 28th, 1852. When publication ceased, the promoters, however, had good cause for satisfaction. During the twenty months in which they had

I. G.J. Holyake - History of Co-operation II. p. 344.

publicly championed the principle of co-operation, they had seen practical tests of that principle rewarded with ever-increasing success, and, as the result of their almost unaided efforts, they had seen such ventures sanctioned by legislation. They had seen also the convening of a great Co-operative Conference, a true Labour Parliament in their own hall in London.^I

Little has been said about the actual "Producers Associations" established by the Christian Socialists. The first Association (or Co-operative Productive effort) was that of the Tailors established on January 8th., 1850. The promoters started without any guidance, save the study of Associations in Paris, and in consequence, had little knowledge of the actual difficulties which would arise. In order to learn, it was necessary for them to launch a certain number of Associations, if possible in different branches of industry, to watch these with the closest attention, and to be constantly ready to modify their methods to meet the needs which practice alone would reveal. The shoemakers, a business which appeared to lend itself to the methods of the Christian Socialists, provided eight of the original associations. Unforeseen difficulties arose, both with individuals and

I. Ludlow's "Farewell". Christian Socialist Vol. II. p. 209. (N.B. After January 1852 the name of the paper was changed to "Journal of Association")

with the trade, and of all the Associations none showed more disappointing results.

These schemes were widely copied in the Provinces. The plush-weavers of Banbury, the cloth-weavers of Galashiels, the calico-weavers of Salford, the sawmakers of Sheffield, the stonemasons of Sunderland - these were some of the Associations which, though not connected with the Society, yet worked in close contact with it. In several towns, organisations parallel in scope to the 'Christian Socialist Movement' sprang up, such as the General Labour Redemption Society of Bury, the first object of which, as set out in its constitution was to unite labourers "by forming associations".^I This organisation was founded on Sept, 16th, 1850, by the "Central Committee of the Iron Trades of Bury", made the "Christian Socialist" its official organ in November, and, on New Year's Day, 1851, mustered nearly eight hundred members to meet Maurice, Hughes, and Neale when they visited the North. Tailors' Associations grew up like mushrooms as a result of the eloquence of Thomas Cooper (1805-92) well known as a leader of workingmen's movements and as a radical orator, who was appointed manager of the first Tailors' Association on Jan. 18th, 1850.

I. B. Jones - Co-operative Production Vol. I. pp 98-100.

Some of these associations failed to live more than a few months; but they served to proclaim that all was not well with the existing social order, and to prepare the way for that great movement of industrial and political reform of which the Christian Socialists were the most important pioneers.

Most superficial students of the Christian Socialists remember them as a band of well-meaning amateurs, who regarded "Producers' Co-operation" as a panacea for all social ills, and who were proved to be wrong. It is true that most writers give the impression that, even in their failure, they conferred a certain indirect benefit upon the workers; what is forgotten is that these men were primarily Christians rather than economists, and that, as Christians, they were well ahead of their generation in concern for the working-classes. They diagnosed the diseases of society with fair accuracy, and endeavoured to discover a cure. The Producers' Associations of workers linked with the spirit of the Paris Revolution of 1848, seemed to them specially adapted to embody the spirit of Christianity in action, that is, of brotherhood. They were honestly convinced that, if the industrial situation was to be transformed, it was with production that a start must be made. They

founded their Associations, and, regarding them as experiments, noted the results week by week. At the end of it all they retained their confidence that "Association was the most fruitful method of reforming industry", but they discovered that the idea could not possibly be applied with success until more real moral and secular training had been given to the workers themselves.

More than that, they lent their support eagerly to the application of the principle of co-operation in the easier field of distribution. Thanks to Robert Owen, the general public regarded all attempts even at "Distributors Co-operation" as essentially godless and revolutionary, and only the Rochdale Pioneers were actually gaining ground. The Christian Socialists rallied and united Co-operators all over the Kingdom; they provided the movement with a legal Status (Slaney's Act) and an organic corporate life; they supplied out of their own number, experts who were to lead the co-operative movement for the next forty years. In practically every field of social service the influence of the Christian Socialist adventure made itself felt - Kingsley's enthusiasm for sanitary reform, Maurice's devotion to the education of the workers, Ludlow's heroic efforts on behalf of the Friendly Societies - are but a few of the ~~of the~~ movements for ameliorating the lot of the underprivileged which owed their inspiration to Christian

Socialism. These results are ignored by Mrs. Sidney Webb^I (then Miss Beatrice Potter) in her sweeping criticisms.

With the passing of Salney's Act, and the granting of legal status, to co-operative Societies, much of the work of the Group was no longer necessary, and they turned their attention to the field of education. First of all, courses of lectures were arranged, and the success of these led to the establishment of the Working Man's College on Oct. 30th., 1854. In the college, the little band of Christian Socialists had a bond of common service until after Maurice's death, though by 1854 their corporate contribution to social reform had ended.

One of the most serious criticisms brought against the Christian Socialists was that they were, at times, actively hostile to the developments of the Trade Union² Movement. It may be that, in this instance, the group was mistaken, but it is easy for later generations to be wise after the event. This criticism is based on the assumption that the particular line of development followed by the Trade Unions in the 'fifties was of real benefit to the workers, and that this must have been apparent.

I. See The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain - B. Potter p. 154 ff.

2. S. & B. Webb - History of Trade Unionism p. 207.

Such critics neglect the fact that from the first the Christian Socialists made repeated efforts to solicit the support and sympathy of the organised trades; that, after a short experience, they advocated baldly the formation of Associations for production on self-governing lines by the Unions themselves, and that, when the opportunity came, they assisted them in the effort to do so.

There is a tendency to-day to praise the work of the Christian Socialists in the field of education, and to dismiss their adventures in the field of co-operative production as an episode. The strength and permanence of their message comes from the fact that they were in the best sense of the word educators in all that they did. If they lacked business acumen and the foresight to see the futility of attempting to establish Producers' Co-operation in the society of their day, their failure brought them, and many members of the Churches, into close contact with the problems of the common men. The failure of the Chartist movement was, at least partly, due to its lack of highly educated leaders; but Christian Socialism did much to remedy the defect. After 1850, all great movements for social reform had the support of men like Ludlow, with "his well stored mind", his insight into human nature,

his love of his fellow; or like Maurice, with his untiring quest for truth, his breadth of sympathy, and his consistent courage in applying his whole self to meet the needs of the people. Even now, it is absurd to speak of the failure of the Christian Socialists, for the task they undertook is still being carried on by Christian reformers brought up and trained in every branch of the Church. It is impossible to study the relation of the Churches to the social reforms demanded by the Chartists, without emphasising the fact that when the disconsolate mob headed its way from Kennington Common in 1848, with a feeling of utter despair, it was a group of Christian men within the Anglican Church who took up their torch, and kept it alight until the workers could once again take it from their hands.

CHAPTER XIX

The Significance of Chartism

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The student who follows the Victorian scene from 1832 to 1848 finds himself a bewildered spectator of a period of history which can only be described as an "Age of Contradictions"..He reads of Radical Reformers who upheld a barbaric Factory system and lent their support to the establishing of drab and unlovely workhouses; of Tories and Chartists united in their hatred of this new industrial economy and new Poor Law; of Conservative Anglicans forming an alliance with "infidel" Benthamites to combat the Nonconformist mill-owners; of land-owners denouncing the miseries of the Lancashire poor; and of cotton-masters yearning over the sufferings of the agricultural labourers. The agitation for Free Trade, for the Charter, for Factory Reform, and for a system of elementary unemployment benefit (out-door relief) are mixed up in an almost inextricable confusion. Yet the main lines of a pattern can eventually be traced. In the Christian Churches there appear the beginnings of a social conscience prepared to face up to the problems of human relationship presented by an industrial society. The Chartist

Movement was a warning to Chrchmen and to Statesmen alike, that the mass of the nation could not be used indefinitely to maintain the few in luxury.
I

Chartism by 1848 had been defeated, but it had not failed. The labouring Englishman in the 'fifties was much better governed than his prototype of 1830, and he was, on the whole, a finer type of individual. He was better governed, inasmuch as the State had definitely resolved to concern itself with the condition of his life and labour and the education of his children. He was a finer type because, with rising wages and cheaper food, with some leisure at home and the grosser types of insanitation put down, he was recovering his self-respect. It might be said that the working-classes, which in the 'thirties seemed to sinking into a dull uniformity of wretchedness, had been given the incentive of ambition; the possibility of improve^{ment} had been sown in their minds. There was still a vast, untouched underworld, but the problem even of these people was being faced by resolute thinkers. The great industries, however, were manned by families, often much better off than the neighbouring Nonconformist ministers or school-

masters, and they were not burdened by any middle-class necessity of keeping up a position. Crime and poverty, and drunkenness, which had reached their peak about 1842, were dropping year by year. Some facilities other than the public-houses existed for the spending of Sunday leisure; the zoo, the panorama, the free library, the opening of the public parks, were bringing hundreds of thousands within the reach of orderly and good-humoured pleasure. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was a pageant of domestic peace. Not for sixty years had the throne appeared so solidly based on the national goodwill as in that summer of hope and pride and reconciliation. It seemed as though, after all the alarms and agitations of thirty years, the State had swung back to its national centre.

In surveying a period of history, or describing a particular movement, it is nearly always instructive to step outside the era, and see what happened next. Chartism never recovered from the tragic fiasco of April 10th., 1848. The panic that had preceded it was now turned into equally unthinking and more provocative ridicule. As we have seen, the Petition came out badly from the scrutiny of the Commons Committee on Petitions. It was to no purpose that O'Connor shouted in the House of Commons of the

great things the Chartists still proposed to achieve, The Petition was dead and it was never resuscitated. It is true that a National Convention met on May 1st. to consider any further measures, and appointed a new Executive Committee. In a few weeks this Committee ceased to meet; lack of interest combined with lack of funds paralysed any efforts to revive the Party.

After 1848 Chartism was merely a residue. The labours of George Julian Harveyⁿ and later, Ernest Jones are of interest, mainly to students of Marxism, because at this point Marx's ideas began to influence the movement. Chartism became increasingly Socialist, and increasingly conscious of itself as a section of a growing international working-class movement. But this did not help it to regain its hold on the main body of the British working class, because revolutionary internationalism had never gained the ear of the British worker. Furthermore it was not possible, under the easier conditions of the 'fifties, for leaders who were interested in such a development to find means of linking it to positive day-to-day policies capable of enlisting the support of any considerable section of the British working-class. In the main Marxian Socialism makes its appeal to the hungry and the desperate, and both these

factors were much less in evidence than in the 1830's. The period of transition was coming to an end, and the workers were beginning to reap some of the benefits of mechanisation.

As Great Britain became, on an ever-increasing scale, the world's workshop, and exports rose by leaps and bounds, the value of labour increased, and periods of trade depression came to be both less prolonged and much less severe. The displaced hand-loom weavers and other similar home-workers grew old and died off; and a festering sore of misery was removed. Though the increase was small, real wages, and not merely money wages, were higher, and many skilled workmen earned as much as the poorer paid professional classes. The Poor Law Commissioners had become much less rigid in their enforcement of the "principles of 1834", and even the workhouse had ceased to be such a terror to the working-classes. The enlargements of the markets lessened the pace of competition, and employers began to accept more willingly negotiations for higher wages and shorter hours. Joint-stock companies provided new ways of raising capital for industry, and made it less necessary for the employer to set aside every penny he could spare out of profits for the extension of his business. The idea of capitalist enterprise was more widely agreed upon, and, for the skilled workers especially,

the most urgent tasks seemed to be those of building up their Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies into solid instruments of protection, rather than beating their heads against brick walls.

It would be quite wrong, however, to assume that Chartism ceased to exist as the programme of an organised group, abruptly, in 1848. Actually the 'Party' lingered on for another ten years and it is some measure of the sentimental force of Chartism that it should take ten years for failure and ridicule to drain it of all vitality. It is no part of our purpose to trace the details of these ten years nor to give an account of the final leadership. During these years there seemed to be general agreement that Chartism must be placed among the lost causes of history, and individual Chartists were clamant in announcing the wreck of their hopes.

Chartism provides another example of how easily an age may misjudge the effect of individuals or movements upon the life of a nation. Historians of the Christian Church are all too familiar with movements which ^{have} begun in failure and which have yet yielded magnificent harvests to later generations. Even if looked at purely from the point of view of the political programme it declared, Chartism falls into this category. In the lifetime of many of the great

Chartist leaders, most of the famous Six Points became the law of the land. In the year of the final Chartist collapse, the property qualifications was abolished for members of Parliament. In 1872, the system of vote by ballot was accepted and put on the Statute Book. The Reform Acts of 1867 and 1885, made substantial progress towards the ideal of universal suffrage. In the light of the final victory of even these aims, it is blind folly to dismiss Chartism as a notable failure. In point of fact, in the light of such evidence there is a temptation to over-estimate the success of the Movement. It is essential to remind ourselves that not a single article of Chartist policy won acceptance in the House of Commons until Chartism ceased to ^{be} synonymous with revolutionary paganism in the view of the middle-classes. Even the Chartist leaders regarded the attainment of the six points as being only a preliminary to the setting up of an ideal society; and even after most of the points had been gained, social progress during the two succeeding generations was much less in evidence than was political emancipation. The true failure of Chartism lay in the fact that it focussed the minds of its adherents less on the kind of society

I. See M. Howell - Chartist Movement; Final Chapter by Professor T.F. Tout, pp. 294-300.

that they desired than on the machinery for achieving it. Chartism was a protest against the status quo rather than a reasoned attempt to set up anything concrete in its place.

This pre-occupation of Chartist leaders with the points of the Charter was no accident, for on these points only could they find anything like agreement. The moment they began to discuss how political power, once attained, should be used, they became not one, but many parties. This was partly due to the fact that the religious outlook of Chartists was as varied as their social ideals. Until the end of his life, George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) remained a staunch advocate of Owenite Free-Thought, though in his biography of J.R. Stephens he pays tribute to the part played in the Chartist agitation by Christian leaders.^I In Chartism, as in few revolutionary movements, there was a strange blend of religious mysticism and rugged unbelief. Ministers of religion found a place in its ranks, and even among the doubters there were elements of spiritual emotion, sometimes extinguished by environments, but at other times kindled into flame by favourable conditions. Thomas Cooper, a Methodist preacher in his youth, the missionary of free thought in his later Chartist days, indefatigable preacher of the Christian faith in his old-age, belonged

I. Holyoake - Life of Stephens p. 235.

at one time or another to all the chief types of religious Chartism.

The Chartists compelled the Churches to turn their attention to the harshness of the workers' life, and forced many thoughtful men besides Disraeli to recognise the wide gulf which separated "Two nations" living side by side without knowledge or care for each other. Who can say how far Chartism influenced the middle-class Parliament (supported by great Nonconformist majorities) of the mid-nineteenth century to take the first steps towards the social and economic betterment of the people? The last Chartist demonstration in 1848 was regarded by many as a strong argument for a widening of educational opportunities, and doubtless did much to reconcile Anglicans and Nonconformists towards the achieving of this aim. The cry of the Chartists did much to turn the attention of men like Lord Ashley to the brutality of factory-life in Lancashire cotton mills, and, indeed, in every industrial area throughout the land. The fact that the moderate Chartists became absorbed in the Liberal Nonconformist ranks, gave that party a wider and more popular outlook. It was in Chartist days that there began that policy of State intervention in industry, where the interests of the people were concerned, which became more

marked as the century progressed. The social programme of the Chartists, like their political doctrines, was gradually absorbed into current opinion.

Like all epigrams Disra^{le}i's description of English society as consisting of "two nation^s" was only half-true. The truth lies in the fact that the Industrial Revolution had, in the first half of the nineteenth century, increased the disparity between the very rich and the very poor, and had segregated classes geographically, by substituting a life in great cities divided into various social quarters for the more traditionally English life in Villages and market towns which has certain features and interests common to all their inhabitants. But the diversity of Reform movements which characterises the Chartist era, reveals that there were many more nations than two. It was only the worst paid of the working-classes who made the Chartist agitation formidable, for the better-paid artisans continued the task of rebuilding their shattered trade-unions. The Free Trade Movement revealed the growing strength and political consciousness of the middle-classes, while the "Young England Party" and the Oxford Movement revealed the efforts of the old aristocracy to adapt themselves to the new age. It would have taxed even the ingen-

uity of Disraeli to define the line of demarcation between the two nations.^I By 1850 the rungs of a social ladder could be clearly discerned and there came to millions the incentive to mount two or three of them.

The Co-operative movement remained of practical importance as a continuation of Chartist strivings. The influence of the wide diversity of Christian teaching in Rochdale is seen in the fact that the idealist aspect of co-operation occupied the centre of the stage in the 'fifties. This idealism was stressed not merely by the Christian Socialists like Maurice and Hughes, but by rationalist followers of Owen, led by G.J. Holyake.^O It was this movement which, more than anything else, convinced many working-people that they also had a stake in the country. "It is in its intellectual and moral influence upon its members, even more than the financial savings it effects and encourages, that the Co-operative Movement has wrought a beneficent revolution among tens of thousands of working-class families, and has contributed so largely to the social transformation of Great Britain."^I Apart from Chartism it is doubtful if Co-operation as the later nineteenth century knew it would ever have been born.

I. See G.M. Trevelyan - English Social History pp. 545-6.

The expedients by which the new society was striving to remedy the evils attendant on the Industrial Revolution - Co-operation, Education, Factory Laws and Trade Unionism were all inextricably bound up with the programme of the Chartists. By the end of the Chartist age, public opinion was far ahead of parliamentary action. During the middle and later 'forties the novels of Dickens, Kingsley and Disraeli, the pamphlets of Carlyle, and the poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, educated the reading classes in the "condition of the People" question, and sowed the seeds of social reform. People of intelligence had become conscious of the problem of the new towns. Their attitude was crystallised^{150d} in Ashâey's unanswerable question, "Let me ask the House, what was it gave birth to Jack Cade ? Was it not the people were writhing under oppressions which they not able to bear ? It was because the Government refused to redress their grievances that the people took the law into their own hands."

Apart altogether from movements which, in the 'fifties and 'sixties, carried on the struggle for one or other of the points of the Charter, the conscience and commonsense of individuals addressed themselves to the redress of great wrongs. All over England, isolated individuals began to tackle self-imposed tasks, each striving to give dignity

I. See English Saga - 1840-1940 - Arthur Bryant p. 77.

and self-respect to the poorest people. Such were provincial doctors who faced fever and vested interest in a tireless campaign against insanitary conditions, devoted clergy of all denominations, dity missionaries, temperance workers, and by no means least the Quakers, who gave up their leisure time to teach the children of the poor and to organise agencies of relief for their poorer neighbours. If individuals in search of private profit had created the conditions against which Chartists rebelled, it was individuals fired by a great compassion who began to bring order out of the chaos.

So far as Christian Chartism is concerned, in tracing its influence on later ideals we must look to the individual rather than to the system, to the spirit rather than to the letter. The part played by people like J.R. Stephens, O'Neill and Thomas Cooper is not less important because the changes to which they gave an impetus were effected by other hands than theirs. It was their mixture of Christian zeal and sense of social duty which made the complacent optimism of a Macauley, and the easy indifference of a Palmerston to all social evil, impossible to men of sensitive spirit. Many young people who grew up within the influence of Chartist teachers, gratefully recognised the part played

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by Chartist impulse in their work for the community.

April 10th, 1848, did not mark the end of Chartist ideals, nor did 1858 mark the passing of all the Chartists. When Chartism ceased to exist as an organised party, it began to fulfil its mission. Not for the first time in history had the Movement to die in order that its ideals might live. Organised Christianity in the early Victorian age, was too bound up with its own interests to recognise the obvious justice of many of the Chartist claims, but it was, in the main, individual Christians who, when Chartism had become a spent force, put on the Statute Book those parts of its programme which had a legitimate place in an ordered society. Mill's dictum might well be inverted and remain true, "The Chartists had to be vanquished, in order that Chartism might attain recognition and victory".

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